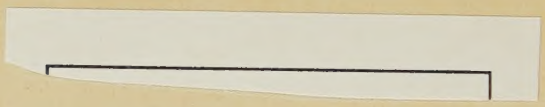
MEHITABLE



MEHITABLE

By KATHARINE ADAMS

MEHITABLE
MIDSUMMER
MIDWINTER
THE SILVER TARN
RED CAPS AND LILLIES
TOTO AND THE GIFT
WISP A GIRL OF DUBLIN
THISTLE INN
BLACKTHORN

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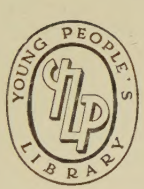
Katharine Adams



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FOR MARY

MEHITABLE

CHAPTER I

MEHITABLE AND BARBARA

"Some day something will happen to me!"

"You say that so often, Mehitable—how can you know?"

Mehitable sneezed, wrinkling up her little freckled nose, as she answered her dear friend Barbara, who lay beside her in the dusty sweet-smelling straw of the barn loft.

"I don't know that I really am sure, Barbie, it's only hope, I suppose, imagining—and then hoping. It's like looking forward to a picnic or a circus next month, only of course what will happen to me will be a hundred times more thrilling than a picnic or a circus.

Barbara's brown eyes gazed rather wistfully out of the wide open space of the barn loft, at the vivid blue of a late August sky.

"I'd like to be in it too, if I could," she said somewhat shyly.

Mehitable sat upright and shook her rather untidy brown hair out of her eyes.

"Of course you'll be in it, Barb," she exclaimed. "How selfish I must sound. It wouldn't be anything if you weren't part of it. Oh, as if it could be!"

Mehitable patted her friend's arm with her thin sunburnt hand, and then began to shake the straw from her striped gingham dress.

"No," Barbara insisted, "I don't see how I could be in anything very wonderful that happened to you. It surely wouldn't be here in Cherryville, Vermont. Nothing thrilling could happen here, and if it should be a long way off, I wouldn't be there at all."

"You might. If I should be a writer, or if someone left me a fortune, you could be my secretary, we could have—"

"Mehitable! Hot soda biscuits! Come!"

A voice in the distance called shrilly. Both girls jumped up quickly, and both called out, "All right, Desire."

There was a slight rustle behind them, and a striped black yellow and gray cat stood up in a dazed sort of way, yawned, and blinked up at the two friends.

"Oh, Patchwork, how funny you look with that piece of straw over your ear," laughed Mehitable, as they all three ran down the steep rickety steps leading to the harness room below.

"They ran across the gravel path at the back of the house, through a dark, damp washroom, and into the large, sunny kitchen beyond. A tall, thin woman stood by the sink, rubbing the sleeve of her blue print dress with a damp cloth. She looked up at them over her gold rimmed spectacles, as they came in.

"I dipped my sleeve in the wild strawberry jam, just now. Shiftless thing to do. Now go right in to supper, both of you. It got so much cooler I made some biscuits."

"Good for you, Desire," sang Barbara, as they washed their hands at the sink. "You're the most comfortable person in the world," she added.

"And the nicest," said Mehitable, giving her a hug. "Now come and have your supper, Patchwork," she went on, pouring some milk in a blue saucer as she spoke.

As she bent over with the saucer her braid of brown hair

fell over her shoulder, and she saw that the ribbon was gone. Desire had picked it up in the doorway, and handed it to her.

"With all her fussing, Miss Webster hasn't made you the least bit careful about not losin' all your belongin's, Mehitable, but I don't know but I like you about as well as you be."

Mehitable smiled at her as she called, "Patchwork!"

There was no need to call, for the ever faithful animal was rubbing himself against her feet.

"Yes, Patchwork, have your milk, do," sniffed Desire, "seein' as how you swam in a whole pail of it, this morning."

"What do you mean, Desire?" asked Mehitable.

"What I say. I left the cover off a pail of milk, and if that crazy cat didn't dive right into it. I heard the splash and came a runnin', fished him out and set him in the sun to dry. My, but he was a peaked lookin' object. I gave the milk to the pigs. It's a good thing your aunt's away, Mehitable, it'll be all over and forgot by the time she gits back."

The girls laughed as they walked arm in arm into the next room.

"Supper's laid on the side porch," called Desire.

A great bowl of wild asters stood on the center table in the sitting room. Barbara picked out some and fastened them in her belt, and laughingly put one in her hair; Mehitable walked to the screen door, and gave a little cry of pleasure.

"Aunt Comfort's best china! How Desire does spoil us! More asters, and cake with pink icing!"

"Mehitable's birthday ain't till next week," said a voice in the doorway. "But I thought you two might like to have a celebration by yourselves. Law, to think she'll be sixteen. Why it seems as though t'warn't but yesterday you two young ones was washin' out your doll's things, and beggin' me for a bit o' twine to hang 'em out across the branches of the white

lilac tree. And now, both of you turned sixteen—it beats all, it beats all."

Kindly blue eyes beamed at them and the two girls smiled back. Desire was so much a part of their lives, that they took her for granted, and yet were not without appreciation of her constant homely goodness. Patchwork had made a hasty supper and whined at the screen door to be let out.

"That cat ain't ever going to be left out. He knows you're havin' somethin' extra. Well go on if you want to," said Desire, as she held open the door. She then disappeared into the kitchen and they heard her singing in a deep rather sweet alto, so different from her speaking voice:

"Wonderful words, beautiful words, wonderful words of life."

The supper was a triumph: cold chicken, creamed potatoes, the hot biscuits with some of the fresh wild strawberry jam, cut up peaches with Curly Horn's cream (Curly Horn was Mehitable's own cow), and marble cake with pink icing. Patchwork jumped upon a green bench near the table, and watched the two with interest. He had done this for a long time, for he was eight years old. Silas, Aunt Comfort's man of all work, had given him to Mehitable when he was a wee bundle of fur with his eyes just open. He had shared dolls' tea parties, and had played various roles in their games, once being dressed as a ballet dancer in a full pink gauze skirt. Those days were over, but he still followed faithfully to the barn loft, and down to their cool retreat by the spring, through red pine needle wood paths. No distance was too great for him. The late sun flickered through the woodbine on the west porch where they were having supper. It touched the bright faces of the two friends. Mehitable glanced admiringly at the asters in Barbara's hair. Suddenly she said, "I'm ugly like my name."

"Why, Mehitable Webster, aren't you ashamed! You're not ugly. You have eyes like the picture of the fairy princess in our old 'Red Fairy Tale Book,' I've often told you so," remonstrated Barbara.

Mehitable smiled and shook her head. When she said that she was ugly, she meant that her dull brown hair and freckled face were trials to her. She did not know that there was a charm about her very wide-open gray eyes, a wistfulness in their depths, and about her sensitive mouth, that would make an unconscious appeal for her throughout her life.

Barbara's brown eyes smiled across at her friend, as they had done since they were babies of four, and Mehitable had come, a timid, pale, little child, an orphan, to live in the roomy old white farmhouse, with her father's sister. Barbara lived next door, supposedly, but she lived mostly with Mehitable. Barbara, too, had no mother, and as her father taught school in a neighboring town, and was away all day, she was more or less alone. There was something very fascinating to Mehitable in her friend's liberty. There was no one to see that she was prompt to meals, or that her stockings were darned. She could go and come as she pleased, but Barbara was a fairly sensible child, and a good little housekeeper for her father.

The two girls were very gay over their supper. They had so much to talk about always, their next year at High School, their picnics, the books they were reading together, for they read a great deal. They talked about Robin and Johnnie, and the funny Bentlys, and the fun they hoped to have, all of them together, for years to come. Mehitable loved to try to put her thoughts on paper, and she had written several stories that delighted her very uncritical audience. She was now trying to write a play.

"Oh, Barbie, I'm writing the play for you. You'll be the heroine. While I'm writing it, I think of your hair, your shining golden hair," said Mehitable, as she cut up some delicate slices of chicken for Patchwork.

"On your birthday let's put up our hair," suggested Barbara. "We are sixteen and I'm tired of having mine in a braid."

"Aunt Comfort would never let me wear it up. I mean not all the time, but for that one day it would be fun."

They pushed back their chairs and Barbara began to pile up the dishes and they carried them out to Desire in the kitchen, Patchwork winding about them affectionately, nearly causing Mehitable to break two of the best plates as she stumbled over him.

"We are going to do the dishes, Desire, we'd love to," said Mehitable.

"No you ain't, not with a sunset like the one we're going to have to-night. You two get right along and take Patchwork with you. I don't want him bothering round. When I get through I may set out for a spell. Now you two run right along."

She flapped a towel at them fiercely, and they ran out laughing.

"Let's take 'Lorna Doone' up on the hill and read it there for a while. It will be light for a half hour or more," suggested Mehitable.

"All right. We left it in our tree. I'll get it."

Barbara ran over to a venerable apple tree near the well, scrambled up easily into its low hanging branches, and from a deep hollow drew out a big dark covered book. Down she came again and arm in arm the two walked past the well and the old red barn, down a shady lane edged with dusty raspberry bushes and on up a steep winding road.

Patchwork followed closely at their heels, arching his back and hissing once at his enemy, a black and tan terrier, who barked at him from a neighboring farm house.

"Aunt Comfort will be back to-morrow, I'm almost sure," sighed Mehitable. "Oh, I'm wicked not to want her back again, but this week has been so happy—you and I together, reading and thinking, Oh, I so love to think, and there's no time when Auntie is home."

They both laughed at this remark, and Mehitable added, "Aunt Comfort has given me my dear home and oh, Barb, she's so good. It's just that I'm a lazy foolish girl. I only want the sunshiny things of life."

At last they reached the top, and for some minutes stood silent. Far and far away stretched the purple blue mountains, the blue valleys, and above them a sky of crimson rose.

Mehitable clasped her hands together and turned towards her friend. "It is all the dreams in the world come true," she said.

CHAPTER II

OTHER CHERRYVILLE FRIENDS

Johnnie Grey whistled three times, paused a moment and whistled again. A curly brown sheep dog ran out from the barn and came up to him, wagging his tail vigorously. A moment later a voice called from the kitchen window. "The girls want you to go off for lunch with them, Johnnie. They're both out on the north porch now, making sandwiches."

The boy's freckled face lightened suddenly, and he called back, "Goody! Tell 'em I'm game. Mother's canning to-day, she'll be glad to get rid of me."

He patted Comrade, the sheep dog, and then settled back against a pillar of the porch, put his hand in his pocket, drew out a book and started to read. He read a page, yawned and then read it again.

"What saith the river to the rushes gray.
Rushes sadly bending,
River slowly wending,
Who can tell the whispered things they say?"

There was a sudden loud barking and a rush. A stray dog who had wandered in from the road, was being unceremoniously put out by Comrade. Several chickens strutting aimlessly about cackled loudly. Johnny glanced up for a moment, and then back at the page.

"What saith the river to the rushes gray.
Rushes sadly bending,
River slowly wending,

It is near the closing of the day,
Near the night,
Life and light
Forever and forever fled away."

The boy let the book fall at his feet, clasped his hands about his knees, and drew his brows together in a frown. Just then the screen door banged loudly, and two glad voices hailed him.

"A picnic, Johnnie," sang Mehitable. She sprang lightly down the steps, in spite of the heavy basket she carried, and stopped to pick up the book that Johnnie had let fall. "What a way to use my treasure," she said reproachfully.

Johnnie took the basket from her and reached over for a tin pail that Barbara handed him from the porch. "I'm sorry, Mehitable. I was thinking about it, that's why I dropped it. But isn't it good to have a picnic?"

"Only the third we've had this week," sang Barbara happily, as the three crossed over to the path by the barn that led to the hill. Desire called after them. "Be back by five o'clock, Mehitable, won't you, for your Aunt Comfort is sure to be home to-night." They called back gaily that they would.

The sun was yellow and joyous and not yet too warm, and three very happy human beings made their way up the hill. Mehitable carried two books and a writing pad and pencil, Barbara a small work box. Johnny though heavily laden, kept up with them at a good pace. The three stopped to rest under the old apple tree, half way up the hill. Suddenly Johnnie laughed and called their attention to a small object rapidly making its way towards them.

"Patchwork! Bless his heart, he never fails. I forgot him when we started," cried Mehitable.

They waited until he caught up with them, each one patting his funny striped head. Comrade frisked about him in welcome, as they all started on again.

The scent of the clover swept over them. There were wild flowers all along the road, late ones, even wild roses, very wide awake and pink after their night's sleep. There was only one cloud in the sky, a downy white and gray one. Meadow larks sang and a saucy bob-o-link twittered at them from a nearby bush.

They were passing a tree laden with very late cherries, and suddenly a loud whoop startled them. "It's Robin," called Johnnie.

"Stealing cherries again, Robin Ward? When will you ever grow up?" demanded Barbara, at the same time catching a branch covered with very dark juicy ones, thrown down at her suddenly by an unseeen hand.

"Never," was the answer from somewhere deep within the leafy greenness. "And neither will you. Another picnic! Suppose I come along, too."

"Do," answered Mehitable. "And here," she added, "here come the Bentlys; they will love to come, I know. There are so many of them at home, and one of the grown up sisters, Clara I think, has a college friend visiting her. They have all sorts of plans and don't want Sadie and Ruby to know about them at all, don't want them around."

"But there isn't enough lunch," objected Johnnie, at the same time waving a welcome to the approaching figures.

"Yes there is, greedy thing. We made a great many sandwiches," said Barbara, reproachfully.

"Here are cherries," said Robin Ward, as he swung himself down from the tree, a big basket of dark, delicious fruit, on his arm.

"They would taste sweeter if they were stolen I know," he added. "But as it happens old Merriwether told me to pick all I wanted."

"Old Merriwether!" the girls exclaimed in surprise, and Johnnie whistled.

The Bently girls had come up to them, and they too stared at Robin Ward. His dark laughing eyes danced at them mischievously. Merriwether was a cantankerous old man who had often chased the boys from his trees with a riding whip in their younger days.

"Why you see it's this way," explained Robin, holding out a branch of cherries to each one of them. "Old Merriwether's so afraid of ghosts."

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Sadie Bently. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, I met the old man last night as I came along by the wood just above the graveyard. I'd seen him on his way to the village just after supper. He hardly ever goes alone he's so afraid of ghosts. He makes his wife or his one-eyed daughter go for the mail evenings."

"Silly old thing," put in Johnnie.

"Well, last night he went to that meeting about the County Fair. It was a dark night and when he went by the graveyard he says he saw a white figure sort of bending over and moaning."

"He's a crazy old man," exclaimed Ruby Bently. "A ghost in our graveyard. He must have been drinking."

"He never drinks," said Johnnie. "He wears a temperance badge. Well, he was in a bad way from fright, shaking and trembling. I tried my best to calm him, and I walked all the way home with him, and all the time he was telling me about the awful figure he'd seen back there in the graveyard."

By this time they were all walking up the hill together, and Robin went on with his story. "He held onto me till we came right up to the kitchen door. His wife opened the door and old man Merriwether began to tell her all about it right off.

I heard him all the way down the lane. He was so grateful to me for seeing him home, he said for me to pick all the cherries I wanted to."

"They're splendid ones," said Mehitable, "and a fine addition to our feast. Come with us, won't you Sadie and Ruby, and we'll all have a picnic together."

"We'd love to," answered Sadie delightedly. "Ma baked some little sponge cakes this morning. She'll give us some I know. Where are you going, up in the hollow?"

"Yes," answered Robin. "It's the only place I know that really was made for a picnic. Mehitable says the fairies made it."

"I'll run and get the cakes, and I'll bring anything else I can find," and Sadie, the more energetic of the two Bentlys, ran off down a dusty lane toward a drab looking farmhouse, at the far end.

"I wonder what old man Merriwether really did see," mused Mehitable, as they sauntered on very slowly, pausing often to wait for Sadie. Johnnie chuckled, and Barbara looked first at him and then at Robin. "Oh, Robin Ward, you dressed up as a ghost to frighten an old man. Aren't you ashamed, and you nearly sixteen?"

Robin looked a little sheepish for a moment, and then smiled at her. This smile was a thing of sunshine. It had helped him over many a hard place. It had saved him an occasional whipping at school, and it shone now on Mehitable and Barbara. "It was only a joke, and I was so good to him afterwards. Somehow it was a kind of ghostly night, so cloudy and still—I couldn't help it, scaring old Merriwether, I mean. Oh, it was fun watching for him to come along! I hid behind that tall thin slab—the one that has the angel with the hand broken off and has turned sort of green."

"Oh, Robin, hush, how can you! It makes it all seem so dreary," exclaimed Mehitable.

"Sadie's coming, I'd better go and help her with the basket," and like a flash Robin was off down the road.

"Ma gave me some potatoes to roast," said Sadie as soon as the two caught up with the others.

"Splendid. We're nearly there," called back Barbara over her shoulder.

"We'll build a fire; what fun! There is no place like the hollow for a picnic. Think of finding those fine rocks there, so we can have a fire without being afraid of burning up the flowers and ferns," said Mehitable happily.

They had left the road, and were treading a rosy pine path which led into the wood. Pine and birch trees murmured in the summer breeze. Mehitable was very quiet as they went farther into the wood, the same look touched her eyes that had been there when she and Barbara watched the sunset. Robin walked beside her carrying Sadie's basket with one hand and the cherry basket with the other.

"Will you ever grow up, Robin?" asked Mehitable, as Barbara had done.

Robin glanced at her half mischievously—half pleadingly. He and Mehitable had been friends since the doll days when he and Johnnie had tried to lure the girls away to play Indian. Robin had always been the Indian Chief.

"Do you want to grow up? he demanded. "Do you want to stay in and sew all day with your Aunt Comfort and grow thin and pinched like Miss Prince, the dressmaker?"

Mehitable laughed, as they came up to the others. "Oh, Robin, I'll never, never grow up in such an unhappy way. How can you make growing old such a sad picture! But come, all of us, gather wood for a big fire."

They had come up with the others. Robin threw down his basket and they all began to look about for brush and twigs. Their picnic place was a deep hollow in the forest, full of ferns and wild clematis. The deep woods were all about them, silent except for the singing of the wind, and the occasional flutter of a wild bird. They began to pile up the brush in the center of two big rocks, blackened by their many fires. Robin and Johnnie gathered great armsfull of wood and soon the orange and red flames were leaping high. They were all very hungry, and as soon as the fire had died down a little, they put in the potatoes, placing them as much as possible between the stones and in the crevices of the rocks. Johnny and Mehitable watched them carefully, pushing them about, and nearly burning themselves in their desire to have them just right. Barbara and the Bentlys unpacked the sandwiches and the cakes and Robin piled the cherries in a glowing scarlet heap on some green leaves, in the center of another big rock nearby, which they called the table. Soon they were laughing over the hot potatoes. They sat about in a circle. The faint rays of the sun, shining through the dense trees, touched their happy faces. The sweetness of the pines, and the mysterious coolness of the deep wood, came to them on the wind. To Mehitable it was an enchanting day. How good the food tasted! What happy times they had, all of them together.

"We haven't any butter for the potatoes," said Sadie Bently.

"Who wants butter!" answered Robin. "Why this is a wonderful meal. It's just the sort of a meal I'd choose always, hot potatoes and ripe cherries."

"It's the sort of meal I'd choose if a fairy should appear suddenly in a wood when I was very hungry, and should tell

me I could have anything I liked to eat." This from Johnnie.

"Oh, no, Johnnie—not if you really had a fairy wish," remonstrated Mehitable. "If I had a fairy meal to choose, it would be—it would be—let me see," she went on dreamily. "Chestnuts and whipped cream frozen together. I read about it somewhere. And a salad of iced fruits and something to drink in a tall green glass."

"I'd chose apple dumplings," said Sadie Bently, unexpectedly.

They all laughed at this, and then Robin remarked to Mehitable. "The play, Mehitable, what about the play? You know you're going to write one for us. We've had so many plays we've made up out of books, and now we want a real one, one you've made up yourself."

Mehitable clasped her hands about her knees, and looked rather serious, as she answered him. "I've been thinking and thinking," she said, "and all the time it's a winter play I want to write. Oh, it's foolish to try to do it at all. I suppose I don't know how at all, you know, only it's such fun to try." She looked around at them all, smiling a little shyly.

"Oh, Mehitable, of course you can write a splendid play for us," said Barbara encouragingly. "Think of all the things you've always made up for us to do."

"Yes, no one could ever think of as many lovely things for the dolls to do, as Mehitable could," put in Sadie Bently.

Mehitable looked at her for a moment. Sadie had been more interesting in those days. She had been a real mother to her dolls.

"It's a winter play I'm thinking of,," said Mehitable slowly, "I can't quite tell you about it, yet, but I think I can very soon."

"Winter seems such a long way off, and yet school will begin so soon and only Saturday afternoons to play in," said Barbara.

"What if the thing should happen to you this winter, Mehitable? You know, the wonderful thing that's going to happen sometime. What if your mother's friend, Mrs. Lindsay, should send for you to come to Japan?"

"Oh, Barbie, that could never, never be," laughed Mehitable.

It was growing late and they gathered their baskets together, and started slowly homeward.

Miss Comfort Webster had driven ten miles in the August sun, and as she turned in at her own driveway she gave a sigh of relief. It was good to be home again. She peered out at the side of the buggy just as Desire opened the kitchen door and came down the steps.

"So you're home again, Miss Webster. Seems as if you've been gone quite a spell."

The horse stopped mechanically in front of the steps, and Miss Webster handed out several packages as Desire came up to her.

"Here's some of Rose Biddle's sugared doughnuts, she sent them to Mehitable. Where is she?"

"We didn't expect you until to-night, Miss Webster, and the two girls have gone off on a picnic. Johnnie Grey went, too. I just fixed 'em up some cold lunch and let them go off for the day."

"Has Mehitable helped you with the jam?" demanded Miss Comfort, as she climbed rather stiffly out of the buggy, old Silas having come up to take the horse.

"All I'd let her. Yes, she helped real well."

"Hump! I'll warrant she wasn't in the house except to sleep for more than an hour a day. You spoil her, Desire. Well, Si," turning to the old man. "How does everything go?"

"Fine, fine, I was just out back of the barn feeding the pigs when you came drivin' up, Miss Webster. I've worked real hard these days. Well, here come the young folks. They do seem to git the best out o' life, now don't they?"

The little picnic party had just appeared around the corner of the barn, Robin and Johnnie carrying the baskets. Mehitable came up to her aunt and kissed her timidly.

"I didn't know you'd be home so early, Auntie. Oh, we've had such a happy time."

"It's been the best of all our good days, Miss Comfort," said Robin, smiling upon her.

"Hump! You'd like your days all sunshine, Robin Ward, but that isn't life. What about all the jam Desire has been making this week. How much have you helped?" she asked her niece.

Mehitable colored but looked at her bravely. "Oh, Aunt Comfort," she said in a whisper, "I've hardly helped at all. I've just been playing."

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTHDAY

Mehitable awoke early on her birthday morning. The first thing that met her eyes was a sky of rose and gold. The night before she had rolled up the dark green window shade so that she could watch the stars and the new golden hoop of the moon.

Mehitable loved to make up poems about the stars, and stories about the moon. She had been used to telling them to her two favorite dolls, who always had slept with her at night. She secretly missed her dolls more than she could ever tell, even Barbara did not know how much.

They were laid away now, covered with an old red silk shawl upstairs in the attic. She felt ashamed that she missed them so much, especially this birthday morning. They had always somehow seemed to know of happy events such as Christmases and fourth of Julys and birthdays. Most of all, she missed her favorite doll, Madeline, her dearest.

She lay quite still, looking out at the dawn with sleepy gray eyes. She was sixteen years old that morning. She must forget her dolls and all the quaint happy plays that she and Barbara had had together. As she lay back on her pillows she smiled to herself, old remembrances came to her, especially doll memories, the hours in the hot gloomy attic upstairs, rummaging in old trunks for scraps of cloth and silk with which to make wardrobes for their large families, hers and Barbara's.

She thought of the tea parties under the apple tree by the

well, all the dolls sitting demurely around a small white tea cloth where the blue and white cups and saucers were spread. The dolls had eaten nicely the bits of cookies that had been given them, and had sipped the milk from the miniature cups with their faded gilt edges. They had all behaved nicely except Betsy, the very naughty one, who generally had to be spanked and made to stand in disgrace with her face against a tree trunk.

Mehitable's thoughts wandered to the woods, Robin, Johnnie, Sammie Ross, the Bentlys, Lucy Graves, the doctor's little girl, and always Barbara and herself, playing through the misty autumn Saturday afternoons. The blue haze through the woods, the smoke of leaves burning. How happy they had been in their play! She was asleep.

"Get right up, Mehitable, and many happy returns of the day."

Mehitable opened her eyes with a start, as Desire leaned over and kissed her. The girl put her arms around her neck and hugged her. "You've always waked me on every birthday, haven't you, Desire! What's that in your hand? Oh, flowers?"

Mehitable sat up in bed, tossed back her hair and buried her face in the great bunch of dawn-hearted roses.

"Si brought 'em, land knows where he got 'em. They don't grow around here, not for five miles any way. Old Miss Sutton had some puny ones, but these ain't from her bush. Si does beat all."

"Oh," breathed Mehitable, "they're fairy flowers, Desire, don't you see, so we can't know where they grow."

"Hump! I don't know about that, but get right up. I've set the table out under old Grandpa apple tree. Your Aunt Comfort says she'll eat out doors for once; Barbara called

from her window that she'd be over in a few minutes, so hurry, get up right away!"

Miss Comfort Webster knitted nervously as she sat in her place behind the coffee urn out under the apple tree where Mehitable's birthday breakfast was spread. She glanced up as Desire placed the cups and saucers before her.

"Dear me, Desire, always extra trouble for you. I've wasted half an hour when I might be busy at my desk. Where are the girls?"

Just then Mehitable called to her as she came running across the lawn. She came up to the table rather breathlessly, fresh in her blue gingham frock and carrying the roses in her hands. Her aunt kissed her on the cheek and said kindly enough, "Come, come, there is no reason for being late, even if it is your birthday. It's canning time you know, and Desire has the picnic supper to see to as well as everything else."

Barbara came flying across the grass, or rather she was running so fast that she seemed fairly to fly. She hugged Mehitable and put a mysterious looking parcel down beside her plate.

"Good morning, Miss Comfort, it seems dreadful to be late on this glorious birthday morning. Oh, Mehitable, you're sixteen!"

Mehitable beamed at her as they sat down, and then turned to her aunt.

"I'm sorry to be late too, Auntie. I woke up early and sort of day dreamed myself to sleep again. Oh, isn't this a wonderful morning? Barb and I will help Desire with the peaches."

Mehitable was still holding the roses. "Where on earth did

those roses come from?" demanded Aunt Comfort, gazing at them in astonishment.

"Silas's gift to me. I don't know where he found them, but I think the fairies must have told him where they grew." Mehitable laughed happily as she spoke. Aunt Comfort sniffed.

"Fairies! Oh, Mehitable, do try to remember you're growing up, and do be careful, they are tearing the new embroidered front of your dress that I put in last week. Here comes Desire with the glass bowl. Give the flowers to her and eat your breakfast."

"All right, I will, but after I've had one muffin may I open one package. Just that small square one. It's from you Auntie, I can tell by the writing."

It was a happy time out there in the sunlight, with Patchwork chasing the shadows of the apple leaves. Even Aunt Comfort smiled at Barbara's account of the trick Robin had played on old Mr. Merriwether, though she spoke somewhat severely.

"Robin Ward should be sent away to school, a strict school. There is no real harm in him, but he only lives for mischief. If I'd had the bringing up of him, he wouldn't be galavanting around frightening people out of their wits."

"Oh, but he doesn't do that very often, Miss Comfort, and he really is such a dear," defended Barbara.

"And never rough or rude, with all his fun," put in Mehitable.

She was opening the present from her aunt as she spoke. Softly lifting away the tissue paper covering from a little square box, she drew off the elastic band, and opened it. A young face smiled up at her, a face with happy, winsome

eyes. It was a small picture, set in an old gold locket. The locket had a rim of black enamel around it, and was fastened to a thin gold chain.

Mehitable was silent for a moment, then she looked up at her Aunt Comfort. "It's mother," she said softly.

Miss Webster nodded. The sunlight touched her tanned, strong face, and the soft, neat rolls of white hair above it. She had blue eyes but they were small, bright, and piercing. Just now there was a softened look in them as she answered her niece.

"Yes, I found it this spring in my old piece trunk up garret. It was in a reticule with some papers, that's why I'd forgotten about it. It's a good enough likeness I think."

"You had one made smaller for the locket for my birthday! Oh, Aunt Comfort it was so dear, so thoughtful of you."

She jumped up, and throwing her arms around her aunt's neck, gave her a hug.

"I—I don't deserve it."

"There—there Mehitable, that's enough. Remember you're sixteen to-day, don't be so impulsive."

"I'm not really crying, Auntie, it's just one tear and I've wiped it away. I'd better not look at anything more until afterward."

Barbara passed her the plate of huckleberry muffins. "Have one of them and then look at my present. You must promise to—no, I'll not say it, or you'll guess."

Miss Comfort went on to explain about the locket. "Your father never would have his picture taken. I've only one of him, a scared-looking object I won't let anyone see, but your mother gave him this just before their marriage. It was sent back with his things after he died out west." Aunt

Comfort spoke in her usual way, but there was a slight quiver about her lips.

Barbara's present proved to be a diary, a dark leather book with the letters M. W. engraved upon it.

"You must promise to keep it regularly. It will be such fun for just that book to see what you write," said Barbara as Mehitable exclaimed with delight.

"Yes," assented Mehitable, "it's sort of mysterious, I can write all kinds of secrets in it. It will hold all my very secret thoughts. See, it has a lock and key—isn't that splendid?" She held up the little gold key as she spoke.

Miss Comfort looked at it admiringly, but without any great show of interest. "It's a handsome book, Barbara, and a very nice idea having the initials engraved on the outside, but I never could understand this notion of keeping a diary. Now for example there is Mehitable, she knows what she's going to do every day and what she has done for the last ten years, why should she write it down?"

"But I don't know what I may be going to do, Auntie—and, oh, there are so many things I can put in it, so many thoughts I make up myself."

Miss Comfort rose from the table hastily. "I've chattered away a good hour with you two, and I must not waste another minute."

"But it was my birthday and we've all three had such a good time," comforted Mehitable, as they busied themselves in piling up the breakfast dishes. She sang softly to herself as she went toward the kitchen. Coming inside she met Desire with a good sized brown paper parcel. When she saw Mehitable she smiled and beckoned to her.

"Now, Mehitable," she said, "I've got something for you.

'Tain't much, but land knows, 'twas hot work stewing over it these last few weeks." She undid the parcel as she spoke, and shook out the contents.

"Oh, Desire, you did all that work for me! You dear, dear friend," Mehitable gave her a hug as she spoke. Desire beamed on her.

"Ain't it a lovely red? Do you know what it is? It's a hood and cape, real close knit. You can wear it cold nights next winter when you go skating."

Mehitable held the red garment close to her and smiled lovingly at Desire, she was feeling so happy. "I don't deserve your all being so good to me but I thank you so much, I'll love to wear this next winter. Now I'll go and find Silas."

She found him weeding, grumbling to himself as he bent over his work. He straightened up and looked around as Mehitable came up to him. "I want to thank you for my birthday roses, Si, they were the first things I saw this morning, when I woke up, except the sky. They're beauties, Si, sort of dream roses."

Si's smile wrinkled up his old face delightfully as he answered. "That's it, Mehitable, that's it, dream posies, that's what they be, you always hit the nail on the head. So now you're grown up. Sixteen is it? And your third year at high school comin' on soon. It don't seem true. Why t'warn't but yesterday, seems like, you'd come out and say how you'd taken all our baby dolls for a long ride in the old buggy in the barn. How you going to celebrate to-day?"

"We're having a berrying picnic over in the north woods, and supper there. I must run now and help Desire. Thank you worlds for my roses, Si."

Barbara and Mehitable worked all the morning in the big sunny kitchen, paring peaches, and stirring the delicious mixture in the great iron kettle. They both wore gingham

aprons tied about their necks. Mehitable wore the chain and locket around her neck under her apron. For her that morning, everything was happiness; Aunt Comfort had never been so kind. "Almost like a girl herself," thought Mehitable wonderingly.

Sadie Bently appeared during the morning with a chocolate cake she had made herself, and a box of peppermint creams from Ruby.

"Ruby made the candy last night—used up all the extract of peppermint and of course Grandpa had to go and have a toothache in the night and wanted it. I hope the cake is good. We're all looking forward to the picnic. Robin and Sam Ross have gathered brush enough for a great big fire up there by north wood."

It was a jubilant party of blueberry pickers who crossed the north meadow that afternoon. The Bentlys and their cousin Cora Barnes from Green Center, a nearby town; Lucy Graves, the doctor's daughter; Robin Ward and Johnnie; funny red-haired Sammie Ross and his inseparable friend, Erastus Peters.

All the afternoon the meadow and woods rang with the echo of their happy voices and laughter. Pails and baskets brimmed with blue as the berries were tossed in by brown juice-stained fingers. Patchwork leaped excitedly about from group to group. Once he upset a basket of berries and ran hurriedly off to the woods, soon to return with an innocent and unconscious expression.

Mehitable and Johnnie found a particularly fine patch and picked together for a long time. Mehitable sat down in the shade at last and fanned herself with her big straw hat. "This is the happiest birthday I've ever had. I don't suppose there will ever be another quite like it."

"Why not? Won't we be always having birthdays?"

"Yes, but we won't always be together," Mehitable answered.

"That's true. I'm going away when I'm old enough. Mehitable, you don't know how I long to go out in the world. I'm only fifteen. Oh, I want to grow up so badly. I want to go to New York and have a studio and learn to be an artist. You know that man who was here last summer, the artist? He liked my sketch of all of you building up the fire in the hollow. Oh, I'm tired of being just a country boy running errands!"

Mehitable gazed at her friend in astonishment, she had never heard him speak this way before. She herself had dreams of a world beyond Cherryville, but she was hurt, somehow, at Johnnie's passionate desire to leave it. She tried to think of some word of comfort for him. "I feel that you will be famous some day, Johnnie. I feel almost sure of it."

Johnnie shook his head gloomily and then smiled. "I wonder if either of us will ever go away, or if we'll always be right here in Cherryville," he said.

"It's a pretty good place to be in," Mehitable exclaimed, as she stood up. "But there is so much to see and do beyond it," she added.

Robin was calling to them, and soon they were all watching the great bonfire that blazed and danced in the soft twilight. Desire had come up in a farm wagon and was kneeling in front of some baskets lifting out bundles of goodies for the supper. The girls helped her; the boys cut pointed sticks, and soon they were all toasting their hands and faces over the fire as they fried slices of bacon. They tried to persuade Desire to stay, but she said she had no time to waste and that the crickets made her jumpy, so she mounted beside the farmer boy and drove home.

It was the merriest kind of a meal. After awhile the moon showed faintly and the fire seemed very scarlet in the gloaming. Robin sang "The Gipsy Trail." A cousin who had been visiting at his home had left the song and he had learned it. What a melody it had! What swing and charm! Soon they were all singing it:

"Ever the wide world over, lass, ever the trail held true,
Over the world and under the world and back at the last to you."

What a thrill in the words, "Over the world and under the world," Mehitable thought as she sat in the shadow her hands clasped together, a way she had when very happy or excited. Sweet scents floated to her from the wood. The homesick chirp of crickets was all about her; stars were blazing in the blue sky. It was the night of her happiest birthday.

On their way home they met a belated hay wagon, and knowing the good-natured lad who drove it, they hailed him, and the girls climbed up to the top. Slowly the horses wended their way home through the white moonlight. Robin, Johnnie, and the other boys walking beside them.

There was something enchanting in this ride on the silvery hay, slowly jogging through the scented night air, Mehitable thought, the nicest part of the whole day.

As they came up to the bars which led to Aunt Comfort's lane, they met a leisurely moving figure coming up from the village. It was a farm boy who lived nearby. "Is that you, Mehitable Webster?" he asked, peering near-sightedly up at the hay. "Here's a letter for your aunt. I just picked it up at the post office, along with some others. It's got a kind o' queer stamp on it, I guess it come from Chiny, or some place way off."

CHAPTER IV

SOMETHING HAPPENS

Miss Comfort sat idle; her hands were folded over a letter on her black alpaca lap. She was sitting in a straight chair by the window and she could see into the vine-covered kitchen window of the house next door. The girls, Mehitable and Barbara, were there. She could hear their voices faintly. It was Saturday afternoon and Barbara's father would be home for early supper. She was making an iced cake and Mehitable was helping her. Mehitable's helping that afternoon meant sitting on the kitchen table talking to Barbara as she beat her eggs and poured in her sugar. They were discussing the coming winter. Both were in their third year of the high school, the funny, drab-colored building with a square tower, at the far end of the village.

"It is so dreadful having to get up at six on the very cold mornings. I wonder, Mehitable, if we couldn't stay over night sometimes with my cousin, Ada Clark. She's very queer, but I know she would like to have us."

"If Aunt Comfort will let me, I'd like to. Do you remember the time we ran away and spent the day with her? How funny it was. We each had three pieces of berry pie, and she let us have all her old fashion books to cut up for paper dolls."

"Yes," said Barbara, "And dressed up in Cousin Ebenezer's clothes. You did look so funny in his swallow-tail coat and

stove-pipe hat. It covered you all up. That was just after my eighth birthday, but it seems such a little time ago."

They both laughed at the remembrance, though Mehitable grew sober when she thought of their homecoming after the delightful, adventurous day, for Aunt Comfort had not realized how the hours had flown without their knowing it, that she had not really meant to be so naughty, and had chastised her. The misery of the homecoming swallowed up the stolen, delightful pleasure of the day in her memory of it.

It was three days since her birthday, and Aunt Comfort had not spoken of the letter that she had received that night, the letter with the foreign stamp. Mehitable had twice tried to speak of it, but something held her back. She was pretty much in awe of her aunt and felt a certain delicacy in bringing up the subject until it was mentioned to her.

Miss Comfort was thinking of the letter as she sat alone in her cold-looking sitting room, a room so straight and trim and awed by its own black walnut furniture that not even the August sunshine streaming in the window or a great bowl filled with goldenrod that Mehitable had picked that morning, could brighten it. Miss Comfort looked old and sad as she sat in the sun by the window.

Suddenly she leaned forward and called, "Mehitable." Her voice sounded stern.

The laughter and the soft voices in the kitchen next door ceased for a moment. Then one called, "Yes, Aunt Comfort."

"Come over here, will you please, I want you."

A moment's silence, and then Barbara's kitchen door slammed. There were flying steps across the lawn and up the veranda and into the sitting room. As Mehitable came up to her aunt, she looked quite a little girl. She wore a last year's summer dress and her braid of brown hair fell over her shoulder. The ribbon had come off and she held it in

her hand. She looked up at her aunt a little fearfully. In years gone by, the tone with which she had called her had generally meant trouble. What had she done, she wondered, then her eyes fell on the letter in her aunt's lap.

"I've had a letter, Mehitable, from your mother's school friend, Mrs. Lindsay. It concerns you, as of course all her letters do. There is no reason," she added rather grimly, "why she should be concerned with me," Miss Comfort opened the letter and glanced down the page. "She begins with some sort of foolishness about going to a garden party in a gin-riksha. Outlandish doings in an outlandish country, I think."

"Oh, Aunt Comfort, it's Japan! Think, the cherry blossoms and the little rustic bridges and the lights twinkling down the little streets at night! I was reading such a lovely story about it the other day. It must be the dreamiest country in the world."

"Hum! Perhaps a good place for you to keep away from then," answered Miss Comfort, smiling as she spoke. Then she grew serious and went on with the letter. "She does come to the point after awhile. I'll read you what she says: 'As you know I have always had the deepest interest in Rosamund's child, even though I have never seen her. I am writing you now, very seriously, to tell you that it is my earnest wish to send her to a good school, and the one I have chosen is in Paris, or just outside in Neuilly.' "

Mehitable uttered a sudden little cry, clasped her hands together and then stood still.

Miss Comfort looked up from her letter and spoke rather sharply. "If you take on so, I'll not read another word," she said, and then went on slowly. Mehitable gripped her hands together and stood perfectly still.

" 'As she is just sixteen, I think she should go this autumn, and as good luck will have it, there is a vacancy in this school

of Madame de Villiers. If you consent to Mehitable's going, please cable me here at once so that I can cable Madame de Villiers. The school begins the last of September, and on the twenty-fifth of September, my friend, Miss Meadows, is sailing for England. She will be glad I know, to have Mehitable as a traveling companion, and will see that she reaches Paris safely.

" 'I enclose Miss Meadow's address, and am writing her to engage Mehitable's passage on the boat as soon as she hears from you. When I hear from you I'll cable her the money for the voyage. Inclosed please find check for your cable, and, dear Miss Comfort, please do not mind there being something left for some pretty things for Mehitable. Young girls love finery and I'll be so happy to think she has what she wants'."

Miss Comfort folded the letter sharply together. "I guess I can fit out your wardrobe without any help from her," she remarked, "I shall return the money for your clothes."

Mehitable looked at her aunt in speechless amazement. "Do you mean that I'm really going, Aunt Comfort?" she breathed.

"I dare not say no to such an offer. I'd not be doing my duty by you if I did. But it's a serious thing, Mehitable, a serious thing."

Was it? Mehitable was not thinking of it that way, she was thinking of it as something too wonderful to be true. France—the French Revolution. What was the story she had read? They had all acted it out in the wood. Oh, the dreams she had of France, quaint old-world streets! Chateaus! Paris! Was Paris anything like her dreams, she wondered. She raised her eyes to her aunt.

"Well," she stammered, "it seems too wonderful to be true."

"It is true," said her aunt quite gently. "It is true and I

suppose it is for your good, so I can't say no." Mehitable put her hand on her aunt's arm. It had always been so hard to tell her what she felt.

"Dear Aunt Comfort," she said, "I—It seems so strange, but this will always, always be my dear home, and I'll love it more than ever if I go away from it."

"If you go! Well, I guess you're going all right. We cannot refuse such an offer. It means you'll see the world after all, Mehitable. You've always wanted to."

There was a moment's silence in the room. Patchwork, always sure of a welcome, bounded upon Miss Comfort's knee and stared at a fly on the white dimity curtain. Mehitable knelt down beside him suddenly and stroked him.

"Oh, Patchwork," she whispered, "I'm going so far away from you."

Miss Comfort stood up hastily. "You'll want to go over and tell Barbara, of course, so run along."

Barbara! To leave Barbara, she had not thought of that. It was all like a dream. How many times before she had gone to sleep at night she had dreamed of going away to a strange school world, but always Barbara had gone with her. She walked slowly across the lawn, up the steps and in at Barbara's kitchen door. Barbara was just taking her cake out of the oven. She turned as Mehitable came in, and gazed at her in astonishment.

"Mehitable," she gasped, "what is it?"

"It's—it's a dream come true, only I never dreamed of France. Mrs. Lindsay, mother's friend, is sending me to school in France this Fall. Oh, look out Barbie, you'll drop your cake!"

CHAPTER V

GOOD-BYE

Besides Mehitable herself, perhaps no one was more astonished at the news of her going to France than Desire. She neither could nor would believe it. "Do you mean to say," she demanded of Miss Webster, the evening after she had told the news to Mehitable, "do you mean to say you'll really let her go way over there alone? I never heard of such goings on."

Miss Webster was sewing busily, sitting close to the window to have the last of the evening light. She smiled slightly as she took quick even stitches in a new petticoat for Mehitable. "It is what she has always wanted, Desire," she answered. "Oh, well, you know Mehitable, Miss Webster, she has always had all sorts of fancies. She don't really know anything about it all. What if she should get over there and not like it?"

"Well, she will have to make the best of it, Desire; a little discipline won't hurt Mehitable."

"Discipline—what's she ever had but discipline," Desire thought. Aloud she said, "It's too late, I suppose, to change our minds, now you've gone and sent that cable. Well I just can't believe it, that's all. Seems like I ain't seen a thing of Mehitable this week," she added a little wistfully.

"I told her to make the most of this week," answered Miss Comfort. "She'll have to be right here whenever I want her after Miss Prince comes next week. It will be a good deal of work to get all her clothes in order."

Miss Comfort sighed as she spoke. She had returned the money that Mrs. Lindsay had sent for Mehitable's clothes. Her pride would not let her accept it, though she was willing to be indebted to her for her niece's education. Money was at all times scarce with Miss Comfort and this new expense was a problem.

"She won't need any but the simplest kind of clothes, of course," went on Miss Comfort. "I'm going to make over that old cherry and white silk of mine for her. It's lain up garret in a trunk for three years. It's good material, and it will make her a nice dress for best."

She looked up over her glasses as Mehitable came hurriedly up the steps of the porch. "I was just telling Desire that I shall have my cherry silk made up into a best dress for you, Mehitable. I shall never want it again and it's a fine piece of goods."

Mehitable stood still in the doorway, holding her big brown shade hat in her hands. She looked first at ther aunt and then at Desire, who was watching her. It seemed as though she were about to speak impulsively, but she checked herself, and when she did speak she said slowly, "It's so good of you, Auntie, to give me your dress. But do you think I'll need it? It doesn't seem right to take it someway."

Poor Mehitable! It was a hard moment for her. The cherry and white silk of her aunt's she had always especially disliked, and there had often been a fear that sometime Aunt Comfort would suggest its being made over for her. Ordinarily, had the suggestion been made, Mehitable would have braved her aunt's displeasure and rebelled against wearing it, even though she knew that in the end she would have to do as Aunt Comfort wished; but because she was going away, so very far away, and because suddenly everything at home seemed so

very dear to her, she could not say how she dreaded the thought of the cherry and white silk being made over for her to take to France.

"Well, I guess you'll need one handsome dress," answered Miss Comfort. "Miss Prince is coming next week and I'll want you right here to try on your things. She's going to make you a nice brown traveling suit out of that big coat of mine, the one with the capes. It's fine goods and I can match the material for collars and cuffs, I know."

Poor Mehitable said nothing for a moment, then she smiled a little uncertainly at Desire. "Barbara and I are going down to the village to the post office, if you don't mind, Aunt Comfort. I'll be back early."

"Yes. See that you are, and you might stop at Miss Prince's on your way home. Tell her I want her to surely be here the first thing Monday morning."

Mehitable joined Barbara outside under the big apple tree where she was waiting, and together they crossed the front lawn and went on down the shaded road towards the village. The odor of apples was everywhere in the air. Trees whose branches bent to the ground with their store of fruit grew each side of the road. A very early September moon showed faintly through the pink and green coloring of the trees.

The two friends walked arm in arm. They were always together these days. Barbara never showed her unselfish love for her friend more than in the few weeks before she went away. Only once did she let some of her pent-up sorrow be seen and that was in the little old, gray schoolhouse. They came upon it suddenly around a corner on their way to the village, and Mehitable suggested that they go inside.

"Just think, Barbie, it's two years since we've been in here," she said as they opened the rather dilapidated door.

"Oh, Mehitable, do you remember graduation day and how happy we were in our new white dresses?"

"Barb, I know I'm a dreadful, ungrateful girl, but it seems as if I couldn't bear to take that cherry and white check dress of Aunt Comfort's. She's having it made over for me and oh, I hate it—I hate it."

This sounded so like Mehitable when she was naughty as a little girl, and angry with Aunt Comfort that Barbara couldn't help but smile. They had come into the schoolroom and had walked slowly to their old desks side by side. Suddenly Barbara sank down on the seat in front of hers and buried her face in her arms, sobbing. Mehitable was beside her in an instant, her arms close around her. "Oh, Barbie," she said. "Oh, Barbie."

"I didn't mean to be so silly," sobbed Barbara. "It—it just came over me all of a sudden—the good times we've always had and—and—"

"And we've thought we always would go on having them together," whispered Mehitable, as a tear splashed down her own face. "Oh, if you knew how I want you to go too. Night after night I've waked up suddenly and realized that I'm going off alone so far away from you. There never will be anyone as near as you, Barbie—never."

Barbara sat up and dried her eyes smiling. "Well, maybe some day I'll come sailing along too," she said. "But no, I'll always be just here. I was right, Mehitable, that day in the barn loft when I said that I would not be in the thing that would happen to you."

She looked around the drab schoolroom with it's rows of desks, its platform, its stove, which was never taken down in summer and which some artistic soul had trimmed with greens. The familiar odor of chalk and dust and ink was in

the air. All the old days seemed to gather around them. Mehitable wiped the tears from her eyes and stood up. What could she say to comfort Barbara?

"I'll try to make you see it all as very very near, Barbara. I'll write everything that happens every day. It won't be much. It won't be as though you were there," she added with a catch in her breath.

Barbara was quite herself now. She too wiped her eyes and stood up. "Oh, yes, I'll love your letters. What fun it will be going to the post office and finding a big fat letter from you. And your diary! Mehitable, promise you'll keep it faithfully."

They were standing by the window now, looking out at the bare playground in front of the little schoolhouse. "Yes," Mehitable answered, "I've written in it every day as you know. The very first thing I wrote was about my birthday, and then I had the wonderful news to put in about my going to France. Think of having that to put in your diary right off. Oh, Barbie," changing the subject suddenly, "remember the time Miss Perkins made us sit at opposite ends of the room for two weeks to punish us for whispering? It was the only time we were ever separated."

They closed the door gently and came out on the road; stopped at the post office which was just below on the main street of the village; found there a letter for Mehitable; and, arm in arm, their heads bent close together, read it as they made their way slowly homeward. The letter was from Miss Meadows, Mrs. Lindsay's friend, with whom Mehitable was to travel. Several had already come from her for Miss Comfort, but this was the first one that was addressed to Mehitable, herself. It was short and cordial, giving the news that Fräulein Brettle, the German governess at the Chateau d'

Estes, who was doing summer tutoring in France, would meet Mehitable in Calais and take her the rest of the journey. It had been arranged by cable and to the two girls it seemed nothing short of a miracle. It somehow made a reality of what to them could not help seeming more or less of a dream.

The trees cast deep shadows across the road. They passed the quiet graveyard and stopping in front of a very small white house close to the road, spoke with a thin, gentle-looking woman who sat in the doorway. They both greeted her and Mehitable said, "My Aunt Comfort wanted me to ask you to be sure to come to us the first thing Monday morning. You know I'm going away and so there is a good deal to be done. I'd like to have one very pretty dress," she added almost involuntarily.

"Well, Mehitable, I'll do my best for you, but land knows it's no use going against any notion of your aunt's. She's the one to say what you'll wear and I guess we can't fix anything that will come up to the grand dresses you'll see over there in Paris. Why, it's the center of fashion—" Miss Prince could have talked on for some time, but Mehitable politely observed that her aunt wanted her home early and the two walked slowly on. Suddenly two dark figures appeared from around a corner.

"It's Robin and Johnnie!" exclaimed Barbara. The boys came up to them and Johnnie and Mehitable walked on ahead of the other two.

"We've hardly had any talk since the letter came. Oh, Johnnie, you ought to be the one to go, you ought to have the chance."

"Yes," laughed Johnnie. "I'd be a fine pupil for your Madame, wouldn't I?"

Mehitable laughed too. "Oh, I didn't mean my school of course," she said. "But Johnnie, your turn is coming."

"I'm glad your's has come first, Mehitable," Johnnie answered bravely. "Isn't it funny," he added, "we were wondering that afternoon in the berry patch if we would ever see the world?"

"Yes," assented Mehitable, "and all the while the letter was coming nearer and nearer. For a whole month it had been on its way from Japan across the Pacific Ocean. Doesn't the Pacific Ocean seem very far away to you, Johnnie?"

"Not so far as France," he answered.

"France," almost whispered Mehitable. "Doesn't it say so much, just the one word 'France'?"

Robin and Barbara were walking beside them now, and Robin looked at Mehitable with rather a wistful expression in his dark eyes.

"So you're going to sail the ocean blue, really be almost a whole week on the sea?" It was the sea that Robin thought about more than anything else.

"Oh, Mehitable, is it true?" exclaimed Barbara suddenly. "Someway I just can't realize all these things."

"No more Latin for you with old Dobbs; no cold early mornings; no arithmetic class," observed Robin.

"No sleigh rides or Friday evening candy-pulls. You're leaving out the nice things, Robin," said Mehitable as they went down the lane toward the barn. Crickets chirped lazily; everywhere was the scent of ripe apples. The old house looked sleepy and rather sad in the evening quiet.

The next ten days were such busy ones for Mehitable that she always looked back at that evening as being really the last one when the four of them were alone together. On Mon-

day morning Miss Prince arrived and the dressmaking began in earnest, or rather, thought poor Mehitable, "the fixing over."

Miss Comfort was very insistent that Mehitable should be constantly about in case she should be needed for a trying on. Barbara of course was present at nearly all of these ceremonials, and occasionally the Bently girls would come in. They were there in the sun-filled sitting room that had been given over to the dressmaking, one early September morning. The brown traveling suit was ready. Quite neat it looked to Miss Comfort and the little village dressmaker, but although she didn't say so, it fell very short of Mehitable's dreams. It looked just like Cherryville. One could not imagine, somehow, wearing it in Paris. She disliked still more the cherry and white check silk. It was being tried on her this particular morning that the Bentlys called. Miss Prince was kneeling on the floor pinning the hem as they came in.

"My, Mehitable, it's lovely," said Sadie and Ruby in one breath. "What color sash will you wear with it?" added Sadie.

"Red," put in Miss Prince, speaking in an odd muffled way as her mouth was full of pins.

"I'd rather have black velvet," Mehitable said, rather sharply. She looked at her Aunt Comfort as she spoke.

"Well," said Miss Comfort, meditatively, "maybe that would be best, black wears better. Now do stand still, Mehitable. Miss Prince can't do a thing while you're so restless. Yes, that's a great success. It's silk that will wear, too. Now don't you think too much about clothes, Mehitable, you're going to school. You'll only need a few plain things It's work you're going for, not to prance around in fancy fixings."

With this last remark, Miss Comfort left the room. After she had gone Mehitable looked at Barbara. "I dreamed last night I had on a white dress. It was soft, oh! very, very thin and soft, and around my waist I wore a green sash, very pale green," she added dreamily.

"Green would never do for you, Mehitable," mumbled Miss Prince, as she sat back a moment to look at the result of her pinning.

Barbara would not have this. "Of course she could wear green, a soft, lovely wood green," said Barbara loyally. Miss Prince looked for a moment at Mehitable's pale freckled face. She liked her, but she thought her very plain. Everyone worked busily that morning, for Mehitable's trunk was to go that evening direct to the steamer. It was wonderfully packed by Aunt Comfort, so neat that the Bentlys and Barbara looked in at its contents with awe. Everything was ready except the cherry and white check silk which would be carefully folded on top the last thing.

Barbara's present was to go with Mehitable on the train in the old brown bag. It was a pink and white traveling case that she had made herself. She had begun to make it the day after Mehitable had told her the news, and she had sewed away at it with almost feverish energy. It helped her somehow to bear the approaching separation, she could not have told just why.

It was quite late in the afternoon before Miss Prince had finished. Miss Comfort went with her to the village on an errand that she wished to see about herself. Mehitable looked after them as they went out of the gate and then turned back and went into the house. She glanced through to the kitchen. Desire was ironing. She had her back toward Mehitable and did not know that she was there. Mehitable

saw her draw her hand across her eyes several times. "It's because I'm going away," she whispered to herself. Suddenly a great longing to stay came over her. She could not have explained it. The magic and romance and charm of her adventure were still there for her, but her home and those she loved suddenly became so dear, so precious. She went on into the living room and stood before her trunk. The lid was still raised, for Miss Comfort was going to fold in the silk dress the last thing. Mehitable, as she stood there, had a daring idea. It had been with her more or less all day. In the night she had first thought of it. She was ashamed of it and would not have told anyone for the world. Could she—would she dare to take what had for so long been her dearest possession—could she manage somehow to take Madeline, her favorite doll?

The rain beat rather heavily against the windows. Suddenly there was a loneliness everywhere. No one would know. Mehitable ran quickly up to the second floor and more slowly on up the narrow attic stairs. Her heart beat quickly. For several moments she stood there alone in the musty silence of the attic. Then she went swiftly over to an old trunk in a far corner and kneeling down, lifted the lid and peered inside. She unfolded a silk shawl, and looked at the smiling, blue-eyed countenance of a doll, dressed in a short blue lawn frock. She covered her with the shawl, closed the lid of the trunk and ran swiftly down to the living room. She knelt by her trunk, lifting the heavy tray, then looked quickly over her shoulder, to satisfy herself that no one was watching. She lifted out a number of heavy garments and laid her doll carefully in the trunk; folded the things back neatly, lifted the tray on again and stood up. At that moment Mehitable felt less lonely than at any time within the past few days. Part of

her was going with her, part of the old days, the old life, a very dear and tangible reminder of so much that she loved. The color was high in her cheeks, and as Barbara ran across in the rain and came in at the side door, Mehitable looked very much as though she had been caught in a crime.

"Why, Mehitable Webster, how funny you look, and what rosy cheeks you have!" exclaimed Barbara.

Mehitable only smiled. She could not somehow tell even Barbara.

The last day came all too soon. How good were Robin and Johnnie. How they went on errands, strapped up the bag, bought Mehitable's ticket. Even Aunt Comfort was pleased with them, and invited them to have supper before they all went with Mehitable to the train.

It was a quiet supper. Desire waited on them, her eyes red with crying. Aunt Comfort sat grimly behind the tea cups. Barbara tried to talk cheerfully, but it was rather a failure. Robin was the gayest one, but even he seemed somehow affected by the general gloom.

"You're sure you have your rubbers in your bag, Mehitable?" asked Miss Comfort suddenly, noting at the same time that Barbara was eating nothing and that Johnnie had refused a second piece of cake.

"Now see here," she said severely, "anyone would think this was Mehitable's funeral. I want you all to cheer right up. I never saw such doleful faces. Robin Ward, you finish your peach preserves and you Johnnie, eat another piece of cake and a big one."

They all laughed at this and someway felt better. Miss Comfort fastened here eyes on her niece. "As for you, Mehitable, you have a journey before you, the first of your life, and I don't propose that you'll start it by starving your-

self. Sit up straight and eat your supper." Poor Aunt Comfort, the parting was harder for her than for any of them, had they but known it.

They all walked to the station, Robin and Johnnie carrying the bag between them, for it was very heavy. Quite a little group they made as the train pulled in, Aunt Comfort, Desire and old Silas, Barbara, Robin and Johnnie, the Bentlys and Lucy Graves, the doctor's little girl.

They had only a few moments to wait before the train. There would be so many things they would want to say afterward, but, in the excitement of the moment, they were not thought of. Mehitable was to meet Miss Meadows at the Grand Central Station in the morning, and they were sailing at noon. Aunt Comfort gave Mehitable instructions as to what she was to do in case Miss Meadows missed her.

"Remember you're to take a taxi right to the Waldorf Hotel and wait for her there," she said anxiously. "Don't get to dreaming in the middle of New York, Mehitable, keep your wits about you."

Just as the train pulled in Robin gave a shout. There, coming toward them, was Patchwork. He had come to the station to say goodbye to Mehitable! As the conductor called, "All aboard!" she sprang forward, holding him close to her face, her tears wetting his warm fur, and as there was only time after that to jump on the train, her last kiss was for Patchwork!

CHAPTER VI

THE VOYAGE

Mehitable turned off the electric light of her berth and pushed up the window curtain. They were rushing past a meadow, silver in the moonlight, then a quick flash of trees, fields again, a sleeping village with only a faint light twinkling here and there, a village like dear Cherryville which she had left behind.

It was enchanting lying there, being whirled through space, the wonder of the night all about her. She had had journeys of only an hour or so before. This sort of traveling was quite new to her. In imagination she had often journeyed to New York, now she was actually going there; and beyond New York, the sea and France!

She fell asleep quite suddenly and was awakened by a shaking of the green curtain of her berth and a voice saying, "New York in half an hour, missy."

It was the voice of the kind colored porter who had opened the window for her the night before. Mehitable was ready when the train pulled slowly into the Grand Central Station. She gave her bag and umbrella to a porter and followed him down the long busy platform. She had Miss Meadows' photograph in her purse bag, but was sure she would recognize her from Mrs. Lindsay's description. Yes! there she was, standing near the entrance door, a kindly middle-aged woman in a well-fitting, dark-blue traveling suit. She saw Mehitable at once, came hurriedly up to her and held out both hands.

"Here you are, dear. How splendid that we have met so

promptly. Now we will go and have a good breakfast. I've a taxi waiting."

She saw that Mehitable looked rather white and tired and put her arm through the little brown clad one as they followed the porter to the waiting taxi. It was so early that there was very little traffic, and they rode swiftly down Fifth Avenue. Mehitable had a glimpse of the big library at the corner of Forty-Second Street, and flashes of color and wonder from the shop windows. Then they drew up suddenly in front of a big brownish-red building.

"This is the Waldorf where we will have breakfast," said Miss Meadows, as they came into the rather deserted entrance hall and walked on through to the dining room.

They sat at a table near the window and began their breakfast. Mehitable enjoyed her iced melon though she was almost too excited to eat. The coffee and rolls were very good, however, so was the Spanish omelet that she and Miss Meadows shared together. Miss Meadows was so jolly and kind that Mehitable began to get over her shyness and was soon making her companion laugh over the description of Patchwork's coming to the station to bid her goodbye. Mehitable laughed, too, but the tears were very near.

"Our boat sails at noon, and I think we had better go on board as soon as possible. We'll take the tube under the river. That will be an interesting experience for you."

"Our boat sails at noon"—what a thrill the words gave Mehitable! So she was actually going! Somehow it was so hard to realize it. Everything was so strange! It was all interesting and pleasant, except the "tube" under the river. Poor Mehitable! Miss Meadows had no idea of how her little companion was suffering! The noise, the crowds, the acid smell of the underground tired and bewildered her. She

gave a sigh of relief when at last they were on the dock and the fresh salt air was blowing in their faces.

Miss Meadows suggested that Mehitable stay on deck to watch the harbor. When the boat sailed out, she herself, went below with the porter to see that their baggage was safe.

Mehitable stood near the deck rail and gazed at the beauty of the scene before her. As they glided slowly down the harbor the great irregular structures of the skyscrapers stood out against the September blue of the sky. Ferry boats chugged back and forth. A great ocean liner gleamed in the sunlight and, more lovely than all else, the Statue of Liberty seemed to breathe a message of goodbye.

Cherryville was somewhere beyond the city—so far, far away it seemed already, but oh, so dear! She was interrupted in her thoughts by Miss Meadows' voice. "Well, dear," she said, "here are some surprises for you. Letters and packages. Come, let us go find our steamer chairs and then look at what our friends have sent us."

Miss Meadows, being an old and experienced traveler, had arranged for their chairs to be placed in a sheltered corner of the deck and they were soon cosily settled in them for the afternoon.

"I always have lunch on deck, but if you would rather, I'll go down with you to-day," Miss Meadows remarked. Mehitable assured her that she would far rather have her lunch on deck. She smiled at the idea as being great fun and began to open one of her parcels. It proved to be a big tin box of her favorite peppermint sticks. How welcome they were. Both she and Miss Meadows took one at once and nibbled the crisp sweetness as they looked at the rest of their mail.

The peppermint sticks were from Robin and there was a splendid book from Johnnie. It was "The Best American

Poets," his own copy. He had given it to her because he knew that she loved it. A note from Barbara, just a few lines hastily scrawled, full of loving wishes and saying little of her own sorrow over her friend's departure. There was also a letter from Aunt Comfort. Mehitable read it slowly and her lips trembled a little when she had finished it. This was the letter:

DEAR MEHITABLE:

As you know, I'm not given to talking very much and I think it will be better to write these words than to say them. You are going out into the world and you are going to find that it is not the remarkably pleasant place that you imagined it to be. You will find that you are not a very important person after all. You will be only one among a great many others. There may be things that will hurt you very much. You will often wish heartily that you were back again in plain old-fashioned Cherryville.

I am not writing these things to discourage you, but to remind you that your grandfather was a Major, in the War of the Rebellion, that he was honored for his bravery under fire. Just hold on to the remembrance of that when things seem hard, and you will hold your own.

One thing more,—don't dream so much, Mehitable. You have your own way to make in the world. You cannot afford to idle your time away. Be grateful for this opportunity, and make the best of it. I am expecting a great deal from you. You are all I have left. Except for your grandparents, who died when I was only a girl, and for your father, you are all I have ever had. I have tried to do the best I could for you, have punished you when

my heart has cried out against it. You are very honest and, with all your fancies and carelessness, you are fairly sensible, so remember all that I have told you and come back to me the girl I long for you to be.

Your loving,

AUNT COMFORT."

Mehitable sat still for some moments after reading the letter. Tears came to her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She wiped them away quietly and read the letter over once again. What a careless, unseeing girl she had been not to have tried to understand her aunt better. How much better her aunt understood her than she had ever dreamed. The letter helped her. It had come when she most wanted it. Aunt Comfort had given her the courage that she needed. She would not forget about her grandfather; how it thrilled her to realize what a brave soldier he had been. She had known it before, but seeing it written in Aunt Comfort's letter made a great impression on her. Could it be Aunt Comfort who had written those loving words, "You are all I have ever had!" Mehitable was too young to realize that there is almost always a time in the lives of everyone when the heart speaks involuntarily of what is nearest to it.

The deck steward appeared with the menu card, and it was fun choosing what they would have. Mehitable ordered chicken salad and ice cream, and, at Miss Meadows' suggestion, had first some hot beef soup. They greatly enjoyed their lunch out there in the sunshine, with the blue and gold sea dancing before them, and sea gulls following them. Everyone was out on deck it seemed. Mehitable saw two girls of about her own age at the far end and hoped to get acquainted with them. She had never known any girls but those in and around

Cherryville. What would these be like, she wondered.

It was two days before she did make their acquaintance, for it grew very rough off the banks of Newfoundland and Mehitable stayed tucked up in her bunk in the stateroom. It was so rough that the portholes had to be shut and the waves made a gray curtain against them. Mehitable lived on grapefruit and wondered that she had ever cared for corn roasts or fudge parties. Food seemed to her as dust and ashes.

On the third day, with Miss Meadows' help, she came on deck. The sun was shining, the sea quiet, and there were three days left in which to enjoy the shipboard life. She did meet the two girls she had seen the first day, and played quoits with them for hours at a time. She found them not unlike her friends at home, except that they talked of things she did not know about, house parties and motor trips, the Boston symphony the winter before. And especially did they speak of clothes. Mehitable had not known before that they could play so large a part in one's life, but they seemed of great importance to the young Misses Wetherall. They were interested to know that she was going to Madame de Vellier's school. They had friends who had been there. Mehitable drank in all they had to say of it with great interest. "It's a very fashionable school," one of them said, but she did not glance at Mehitable's plain little badly-fitting suit as she spoke.

Very soon came the day before landing. In the morning they would reach Liverpool. Miss Meadows and Mehitable were walking the deck together early in the afternoon, and Miss Meadows was talking in her cheery way.

"It's too bad," she said, "that you are having such a roundabout journey, but I'd engaged my passage on this line before I had Mrs. Lindsay's cable. Never mind, you'll have at least a glimpse of the British Isles."

"Oh, Miss Meadows!"

There was so much Mehitable wanted to say. Somehow she felt so young and inexperienced before Miss Meadows' assurance. How lightly she spoke of the British Isles! The old world, the wonderful world she had so dreamed about.

Someone called to them from the far end of the deck. It was an elderly man, an acquaintance of Miss Meadows'. He waved off toward the west.

"See," he called, "the coast of Ireland!"

"The coast of Ireland!" Could it be true? Mehitable folded her hands on the deck railing and gazed and gazed until the sea and sky and faint blue hills seemed to mingle together in the sunshine, a mass of blue and gold.

"They might be clouds," said Mehitable, turning a moment toward Miss Meadows. "But they're really Ireland. Oh, shall I ever go there, I wonder? Shall I ever see a bog and a wishing well?"

"You probably will, Mehitable," laughed Miss Meadows. "So many of your dreams seem to be coming true, why not that one?"

Mehitable shook her head, smiling too. She had so often made up stories of Ireland, so loved the Irish fairy tales! How enchanting really to go there! How fascinating to think of the country that lay behind those hills! Slowly they faded into the blue of the sky as the boat sailed on toward England. Mehitable's last thought as she fell asleep that night was, "To-morrow I'll be in Europe!"

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

It was raining as they came up the Mersey. The boat train lay alongside the dock, and after some little fussing about their baggage, they found themselves alone in a first class compartment on their way to Dover, where Mehitable was to board the boat for Calais. Her eyes were bright with excitement as she sat with her face close to the window looking out at England.

The sun had come out suddenly and it touched green fields and low hedges. It rested lovingly on the roofs of little thatched cottages and on the late roses that trailed about the cottage doors.

"It's England," Mehitable kept saying to herself, "it's dear England." She was so quiet that Miss Meadows asked her if she felt very tired.

"No," answered Mehitable, "not tired, only happy, *so* happy. Oh, the hedges and the lanes and—and everything. I'm really here. If you only knew how wonderful and strange it seems to me."

"Have you read your note?" reminded Miss Meadows. She had had several letters from English friends brought on the boat by the pilot, and there had been a foreign-looking one for Mehitable.

"No, Miss Meadows, I forgot it, because I've been so busy looking out of the window. I'll read it right away. It is from Fräulein, I'm sure."

It proved to be a short note from Fräulein Brettle, who was to meet Mehitable at the dock in Calais. She enclosed her photograph, which was that of a dark, stout-looking woman who wore glasses. Mehitable gazed at it with great interest. This was one of the teachers at the Chateau d'Estes, some one she would be seeing every day. She handed the photograph to Miss Meadows, who looked at it critically.

"She looks kind," she remarked. "I hope you're going to be very happy, Mehitable. You must write to me. Later in the winter I shall be in Paris, and you must come out with me very often. You will be very glad to, I imagine," she added smiling, "you'll want to go to Rumplemeyer's and have some cakes."

"Oh, do tell me about Rumpelmeyer's, Miss Meadows. Is it a bakery? Is it one of the fascinating places where you have cakes with cherries and with whipped cream on top?"

"Yes, it's a sort of glorified bakery, Mehitable, where the very smart people go and where the cakes are very good indeed, and very expensive."

"I wonder if it's like the bakery shop in Cyrano de Bergerac? The cakes sound so good, so very, very good, when you read about them there."

Miss Meadows laughed and patted Mehitable's knee. "Oh, you amusing child," she exclaimed, "to think of your having read Cyrano de Bergerac. When I come to Paris I'll take you to see it."

The train had stopped at a small station, and a small boy put his head in at their compartment window. "Tea, please?" he asked, at the same time depositing a big wicker basket on the floor. "Yes, indeed," answered Miss Meadows, handing him a coin from her purse, "it's just what we do want."

The train started on again and the two had a merry tea in

their funny little box-like compartment. In the basket they found a pot of hot tea; a covered dish of hot buttered muffins and several neat slices of seed cake.

"This is your first English tea, Mehitable. How do you like it?"

"It's almost the very nicest meal I ever had," answered Mehitable, smiling. "Almost as nice as supper in the hollow at home, only quite—quite different."

All too soon they reached Dover, and before she knew it Mehitable found herself on the deck of a boat again, being tucked up in her steamer chair by Miss Meadows in a very sheltered corner. The wind blew keenly, as only a British Channel wind can blow. Its dampness seemed to search through the two thick steamer rugs that covered Mehitable. Miss Meadows looked at her a little anxiously.

"I do not want to say goodbye to my dear little traveling companion, and only wish I could go on to Paris now. Send me a telegram as soon as you meet Fräulein in Calais, if there is time before the train starts. You know my London address, the Hotel Cecil. Now goodbye, dear, goodbye."

Mehitable could only put her arms around her, and say a little chokingly, "Oh, thank you, Miss Meadows, so many, many times, and do come to Paris just as soon as you can. Goodbye—if only you were coming too."

There was much shouting and bustle, people hurrying on at the last minute, mail bags being thrown on deck, chains rattling. Miss Meadows was the last one to leave the boat. The whistle sounded, and they were off to France.

It grew rough almost at once, so rough that Mehitable could only shut her eyes so that she could not see the great gray mountains of waves that loomed up before her. The deck was crowded, because every bit of room below was filled. Mehitable was grateful for her sheltered corner. "To-night I'll

be in Paris," she thought. She tried to console herself with this. "And in fifty minutes I'll be in Calais!" They were a long fifty minutes. For the first time in her life Mehitable felt utterly alone. It was a big adventure, but she was relieved when the dark shores of France hove in sight, and gladly gathered her bag and umbrella together and made her way slowly down the gang plank. Yes, there was Fräulein waiting at the foot. They recognized each other at once, and Fräulein grasped her firmly by the hand.

"Good-day, Miss Webster," she said in funny broken English. "You have had a bad journey—yes? Well, come, we have some minutes before the going of the train.

Mehitable explained that she wished to send a telegram to Miss Meadows and they had just time to do this before their train started. There were several people in the compartment with them. A fat, fussy woman with innumerable parcels insisted on having the window closed, much to Mehitable's discomfort, though Fräulein seemed to approve. "Too much air is a bad thing," she said. Mehitable did not agree with her, but she did not like to say so. Just then another woman, who evidently wanted the window open, began to talk very rapidly in French to the one who had closed it. Mehitable could not understand what she said, but there was no doubt about her indignation. The discussion ended in the window's being opened a half inch and all was peaceful again.

They found that they could have dinner on the train, so after some time Mehitable walked in Fräulein's wake through the very narrow aisles of the different cars until they reached the little dining car. They found a table for two in a corner and were soon partaking of hot soup, very welcome to Mehitable after her tempestuous voyage.

Fräulein grew quite talkative over her soup. She told Mehitable about her three nieces in Hanover, who were so

accomplished, so industrious, Mehitable was sure they must be quite model young ladies. She was interested to hear about them, but was so full of curiosity to know about the Chateau d'Estes that she could not resist asking questions. She found Fräulein not at all formidable and enjoyed listening to her funny English.

"Tell me please, Fräulein," she said, "tell me about the school and the girls."

The subject evidently did not interest Fräulein, she would much rather have talked of her own family and its many merits. "Well, what do you then desire to know?" she asked as the waiter put a platter of chops and French fried potatoes down before her. The chops had little white paper frills which Mehitable thought very funny.

"Oh, I want to know everything, Fräulein. You see it's all so new to me, I'm so very, very interested in it all."

"So interesting then to go to school! Well, well, it is not so interesting to teach all day a great many stupid young maidens," said Fräulein, glancing at Mehitable's eager face as she spoke.

"She is quite plain," she thought, "but she does not fidget or giggle. And what a nice sensible brown suit she wears. Yes, she does not seem as foolish as most of them." She smiled at Mehitable. "You will soon see for yourself what it is like. In an hour's time we shall to Paris come."

She eyed with much disfavor some cherry tarts that the waiter had put down on the table with the coffee. "Madame de Villiers would not approve of your eating those," she remarked. "But it is the last time that you can eat all that you wish, so you may have them."

"Don't they eat cherry tarts at the Chauteau d'Estes?" asked Mehitable.

"Madame does not approve of pastry," answered Fräulein

"But she is very good," she went on loyally. "She allows her pupils to have a pound of biscuits each month, very good ones, oh, quite excellent, from the establishment of Felix Potin in Paris."

"A pound of biscuits a month seems so little. They must vanish very quickly," ventured Mehitable.

"If one is greedy, yes. Otherwise they last all the month. The foolish eat theirs at once and then they are desolated, but a very few are sensible and save theirs."

Mehitable would have liked to ask many more questions, but Fräulein rose from the table, remarking that very soon they would reach Paris. They gathered together their belongings in the compartment, and before they knew it were at the Gare du Nord. All was confusion there. Fräulein clasped Mehitable firmly by the arm and did not let go until, with their luggage, they were safely installed in a little bus. Fräulein drew a sigh of relief, indeed she had seemed very nervous during their rush through the station, quite different from her attitude in the train.

"Oh, thank the kind Heavens that we are at last free from the station, the noise, the rude way that they push one aside. And the luggage carts, they are the worst of all," she exclaimed as they drove rapidly along.

It was so dark that Mehitable could not see very much except a flash of brilliant lights, and a great sweep of wide boulevard. She longed to ask questions, longed to know where she was; but Fräulein sat with her eyes closed and she did not like to disturb her. "This is Paris! This is Paris!" she kept saying to herself.

At last they turned into a great wide avenue. Motors flashed past them on all sides; through the darkness gleamed golden lights and far above were the stately outlines of great buildings. The moon shone peacefully. Mehitable saw it suddenly,

and it gave her an odd thrill. "It's the same moon I've seen in Cherryville," she thought.

Through the dim light, suddenly loomed a great white arch. Mehitable gave an exclamation and Fräulein sat up. "Oh," she said, "here is the Arc de Triomphe. We are nearly there."

At the Porte Maillot, one of the big gates leading out of Paris to its suburbs, they were stopped a moment by a blue-clad official, but Fräulein had only to mention the name of Madame de Villiers school, and they were allowed to pass on at once.

The streets were not so brilliantly lighted now. Very soon they turned off a rather public street onto a long quiet avenue. "This is the Boulevard Victor Hugo, and we are nearly there," explained Fräulein.

After a few moments the driver drew up sharply and they stepped out. They had stopped in front of a high stone wall. Fräulein paid the man and then touched a button in the wall. After a few moments they heard steps along the gravel walk inside, and the door was opened by a small, dark man who peered out at them, nodded to Fräulein and, without a glance at Mehitable, let them in.

They followed the man servant up a wide avenue, dark because of the trees that sheltered it on either side. They came to the end of it suddenly and a great gray house stood before them, dark and stately, grim and mysterious in spite of the many lights that shone from its windows.

Mehitable clasped her hands together and looked up at it. "It is whispering secrets," she breathed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHATEAU D'ESTES

They came from the darkness of the garden into a brightly lighted hall. A wide twisting stairway led to the floor above. From a distance came a sound of music and a confusion of many voices. Fräulein turned to Mehitable, saying, 'Stay here a moment. I will go and say that you have come."

She went on through a door at the left, and Mehitable was alone in the great hallway of the Chateau d'Estes. A fire burned dimly in a far corner. There was a strange looking suit of armor in another corner. A huge tapestry rug was thrown over a couch near the staircase.

Mehitable stood alone near the door where Fräulein had left her. She was very tired, but somehow she did not think of sitting down. It was so strange and bright that for a moment she shut her eyes away from it all. The music still continued. It was a waltz and Mehitable never heard it in after years without thinking of that first few minutes at the Chateau d'Estes.

Suddenly through the music she heard voices. They were quite near her and although she did not look up she realized that they came from the stairs above. She stood with her hands folded on her umbrella, looking down at her bag, apparently not listening, but she heard quite distinctly what was said.

"The new girl who came with Fräulein. What an odd sight!"

"Hush, Tip, she might hear you."

"She can't, with all the music, Una darling. Oh, what a funny sight she is and do you see her bag? Isn't it weird? It might be her great-grandfather's!"

"Don't be so critical of anyone who has just come off a Calais boat. You know we are all frights when we first arrive. She's not funny at all, poor dear. She's tired out. Hurry, there's Fräulein. They may come upstairs."

As Fräulein opened the door, the music ceased abruptly. There was the loud clang of a bell and then a noise as of a great deal of furniture being moved.

"They are pushing back the desks. It's study hour now. You're excused from prayers to-night. Come with me, you must have a cup of tea, and then you can go at once to bed, poor Mädchen. I see that you are tired, come with me."

Mehitable followed Fräulein across the hall, through a door at the far end, on into a huge room where long tables were already set for breakfast the next morning, plates neatly arranged along each side, and cups and saucers at each end. A maid was laying a cloth on a side table as they came in. She nodded smilingly at Fräulein.

The tea was weak and hot, and there was a plate of bread and butter with it. Mehitable was not hungry, but the hot drink was very welcome. She looked around the great room and thought of how many times she would see it in the future. "Sometime it will not be strange at all," she thought. "None of this will seem strange, but oh, now it all—it all is so different."

She tried to forget the words of the girl on the stairs, the one who had said she was odd looking, but they came back to her again and again as she sat there drinking tea with Fräulein. Suddenly she remembered Aunt Comfort's letter, what she had said about her grandfather, how she must be brave as he had been. She was glad she thought of it just then, for it

suddenly gave her courage that she needed. She could even smile to herself a little over the "great-grandfather's bag;" in reality it had belonged to her grandmother.

No sound of music came now from the schoolroom, and when she and Fräulein came again into the hall, it was very quiet. She followed Fräulein up the wide velvet carpeted stairs. On the first landing Fräulein paused.

"I think I should take you to see Madame to-night. She does not know that you have come," she said.

Mehitable would have rather waited until the next day, but Fräulein had already tapped on a door at the left of the stairway. A quick voice called, "Entrez."

Fräulein pushed open the door and they went inside. There was a thick red velvet curtain on the inside of the door and it swung heavily against them as they came in. The room was small and a bright coal fire burned in a tiny grate. A small black and tan terrier came running across the room towards them, barking with short staccato barks.

Madame de Villiers was standing by her desk. She held some papers and a bunch of keys in her hands and, as they came in, put them down and walked toward them. She was tall and held herself very straight. She had white hair and piercing dark eyes. They looked Mehitable through and through. They seemed to see her oddly-made brown suit, her fatigue and bewilderment all in one glance.

"Dear Madame, it is with joy that I see you again," said Fräulein in French. "Here is Mademoiselle Webster, whom I have escorted from Calais."

Madame shook Fräulein's hand and, turning to Mehitable, kissed her on both cheeks.

"Welcome to this new home, enfante," she said. "Now you are tired, you had better go at once to bed. Very soon I will

send for you so that we may have a little talk. Fräulein will take you to your room. Let me see which it is."

She went to her desk, and opened a large black book. "It is number twenty-three on the second floor. Goodnight, then. I hope you will be very happy and very busy here."

They stood aside to let her pass out, for she was going down to prayers. Then they went up another winding staircase.

Mehitable said, as they reached the top, "I thought Madame said my room was on the second floor. This is the third."

"But no," answered Fräulein, "this is the second; the one below was the first. It is so in France."

Mehitable smiled as they walked down a very long corridor, stopping at last before a door marked with the number twenty-three.

"They told me your roommate has not yet come," said Fräulein, "so for to-night you will be alone."

A maid with a gas lighter was just leaving the room as they came in.

"It is soon time for the young ladies to come upstairs to bed," explained Fräulein. "Now," she added, "is there anything that you want? No? You are so tired that you will sleep at once. Goodnight, then," she patted Mehitable's shoulder and went out, closing the door behind her.

Mehitable stood for some minutes in the center of the room, looking about her. It was a fairly good sized room, with two beds in opposite corners, two chests of drawers, and two washstands. There was a small table near one of the windows, and two very straight looking chairs stood about. They were not comfortable chairs, Mehitable was sure. The room unquestionably was a sleeping room and nothing else.

There were two pictures on the wall. One was of a stag at

bay. Mehitable turned her eyes away from it, the hopeless terror in the eyes of the stag seemed so real. The other picture was that of a proud, lovely woman, a woman in a stiffly brocaded dress, edged with dainty ruffles of lace. Her hair was dressed very high and a string of jewels ran through it.

Mehitable went over and stood in front of the picture. She still wore her coat, but had taken off her hat and held it in her hands. As she stood there she heard the sound of many feet on carpeted stairs, and thought to herself that it was "the young ladies going to bed," as Fräulein had said. A moment later there was a quick knock at her door and it was suddenly opened. A short, dark-faced woman came in hastily. She went up to Mehitable and kissed her on both cheeks as Madame had done.

"You poor darling," she said in a high-pitched voice.

"What a stupid time you must be having here all by yourself! I'm Madame Bourget, cherie, everyone's friend. I came in to welcome you, but cannot stay a moment. It is my duty to see that they do not make noise in the hall. Listen!" as a burst of laughter sounded in the distance, "oh, they are épouvantable, those children."

She laughed as she spoke, and Mehitable laughed too. "It was so good of you to come and see me," she said. "I was just a little lonely. She looked up at the picture on the wall above her. "Tell me, please, is it—is that a picture of Marie Antoinette?"

"But yes, it is a picture of the poor queen. How clever of you to notice it right away. Now goodnight. Remember Madame Bourget is your friend," she kissed her again on both cheeks and was gone like a flash.

Mehitable felt rather better after this flying visit. She had not quite so forlorn a sense that she was alone with all sorts

of mysterious and interesting things going on around her, things from which she seemed shut out.

Just as she was about to put out her light, having unpacked her things for the night and undressed, there was a knock at the door and someone came in, a tall, very thin woman in black. She was very plain, quite ugly in fact, and she looked rather sharply at Mehitable as she half closed the door.

"Go to bed at once, Mademoiselle," she said, "you will be chilled."

"I was just going to put out the light," Mehitable answered as she jumped in bed and drew the covers up around her.

The newcomer, who was about to put out the gas, turned toward her. "You must never touch the lights. It is one of Madame's strictest rules. Goodnight," she added as she went toward the door. She paused a moment. "Madame says that because of fatigue from your journey you are to have your déjeuner in your room." She spoke somehow as if she did not in the least approve of such indulgence, or that at any rate was the impression Mehitable received from her words.

At last she was alone. The room was very dark save where the moon made patches of light here and there. She had really arrived! She was in the Chateau d'Estes. She was very tired, but she could not sleep. She was thinking, thinking of so many things, and they all seemed jumbled together. She thought of the train journey with Miss Meadows, the hedges and English cottages, the fascinating tea basket, then the wild rough voyage across the channel. Fräulein—funny, placid Fräulein, who had no sense of humor, what a pity that was,—then the Chateau, Madame—how strange it all was,—the great silent house, old,—so old,—so filled with mystery,—so filled too with young life. Everywhere in the rooms around

her there were girls,—girls whom some day she would know.

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, "someone, who will some day be my friend, a very dear friend, is sleeping quite near me now."

She got up suddenly and put on her big brown coat that lay over the foot of the bed. Then she went over to the window and sat down on the floor. She leaned her head on her arms on the window sill and looked out.

The moon made the garden a thing of silver, except for the shadows. Everything seemed to stand out as etched in gray and white. There was something strange in the contrast of the dim school bedroom and the enchantment of the scene outside. How dark the trees seemed in the shadows, how white the narrow garden paths that wound in and out. A fountain splashed lazily. Mehitable could see it plainly, the figure of a young girl holding a sheaf of something, lilies, she fancied. The water flowed down from them into the little pool at her feet. Far in the distance she could see clusters of flowers and shrubs. In the day time they would be dreams of color. There was mystery about the garden there in the quiet moonlight.

Mehitable clasped her hands on the window sill and breathed in the beauty of it all. This was France! This was a French garden! She felt quiet and happy as she sat there by the window, less lonely than at any time since she had arrived. The loveliness of the old garden had soothed her. How often that evening she had thought of Aunt Comfort's letter! She had needed to think of it to remember very hard that she must "hold her own," for it was all very strange to her, and yes, the remarks she had heard from the unseen occupants of the stairs had hurt her. She knew that that was foolish. Still the words rankled.

Suddenly she heard a very soft sound; someone was trying

the knob of her door. She sat quite still looking at the door and she saw it slowly open. A dark figure came in hastily, shut the door noiselessly and stood looking at her.

"You're the new girl, the American, aren't you? I was sure you'd be awake. I didn't close my eyes the first night that I was here."

She was standing in the shadow, but stepped forward as she spoke. "I'll tell you why I came," she added. "I thought you'd want to talk with someone and also I was so hungry. Have you any sweets?"

"Oh, I'm so glad you came," exclaimed Mehitable. "Yes, I've a box of chocolates in my bag. Wait a minute, I'll get them."

She went over to her bag, found the candy and as she turned back saw that her visitor had seated herself on the floor by the window. She sat in a patch of moonlight and Mehitable was startled at her appearance. She had some sort of dark red garment that looked like an opera cloak over her nightgown, her hair was red, a very light red that shone as silver gold in the moonlight. She had a small elfish face, and even in the wan light Mehitable could see that her eyes were very dark. They smiled at Mehitable.

"Come," she said, "let us get acquainted. My name is Una O'Hara, and from my name you'll know I'm Irish. I've been here at school for three years, except of course for the holidays. I've a father and mother, six brothers and two sisters, and seven dogs, though two of them really belong to my brother, who's stationed in India."

Mehitable got the two pillows from the bed and the two sat on them in the moonlight. As long as she lived, Mehitable never forgot that half hour or so there in the night, when she

first met Una O'Hara. It was Una who did most of the talking.

"Nobody wishes to talk of home just at the very first, I think," she said to Mehitable. "After a time, I dare say, you'll want to tell me all about your home in America, and I'll like to hear."

"There are so many things that I want to hear about," said Mehitable. "Oh, you can't know how I've wanted someone to talk with ever since I came."

"Yes, I know, it's always that way at first, and then you've come a few days after we've started, that's always a bad plan. I hear that you came with Fräulein. She's not a bad old thing, really. And you've met Madame?"

"Yes," answered Mehitable, "yes, I saw her just for a moment," she paused and waited for Una to speak.

She did so at once. "And you don't really know what you think about her at all yet, do you? Madame is deep, oh, very deep, you know. And her eyes, oh, her eyes, they seem to see everthing."

"Do you know," said Mehitable, "it's strange, but, someway, coming at night and all, and not really seeing anything of the school, it all seems like a sort of dream. And this house! It's so mysterious, it seems somehow to be whispering secrets."

Una O'Hara looked at her closely for a moment. "How odd that you feel it too," she mused. "You're different from the other Americans, someway. Yes, I know so well what you mean. It has known so much, it has suffered so much in the very long ago days. My home is like that too. It has seen bitter times."

"Is it so very old?" asked Mehitable.

Una nodded. "It's too old mother says. It's where her ancestors have lived for always. It's so old that it seems very sad and tired somehow. And though the roofs are always and always being mended they leak. But the garden—oh, you should see it. The garden is——" she caught her breath with a sudden gasp. "The garden is divine," she said.

Somewhere a clock struck one. Una half rose. "All the ghosts in the Chateau are walking now. I'm almost afraid to leave you," she said half laughingly. "It's been great fun and the sweets were splendid. I've quite eaten them all. Goodbye, new girl. Do you know I like you?"

Before Mehitable could call her back, she had gone. She gave one last look at the silver garden and jumped into bed. Still she lay awake. She was oddly excited. It was like a dream too, the visit from the Irish girl. How lovely her voice had sounded. Each word so soft and clear. There had been no brogue at all, just the faintest, most charming music through her words.

"I didn't ask her about any of the girls," thought Mehitable as she fell asleep. "I didn't even ask her who Tip is, I was so very, very interested in just her herself."

She fell asleep and dreamed such a confused dream, of Miss Meadows mending the roof of a very old house in Ireland.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST DAY

"Mehitable, come! We are going chestnutting. Robin will shake the trees for us." The voice was real, but where was she? Mehitable sat up in bed and looked about her. The picture of Marie Antoinette smiled at her from above the cold-looking mantle. She was in France at the Chateau, but she had been dreaming of home.

A knock sounded sharply at the door, and Mehitable called, "Entrez," as she had heard Madame do the night before, and felt as though she were really speaking French. The door opened and a short square figure entered the room. She wore a short black dress and white apron. Her face was small and square like the rest of her. What was it like? "Why, of course," thought Mehitable, "it's like the dolls that old Mr. Purdy used to have in his candy shop, the funny dolls with the wooden faces and beady eyes."

The newcomer did not return Mehitable's smile, but she said, "Prenez vous du thé ou du café, Mademoiselle? Ou du chocolat?"

"Du chocolat," answered Mehitable.

"Bien," answered the other, turning towards the door. She looked back over her shoulder. "Je m'appelle Julie," she said as she shut the door.

This last was lost on Mehitable. She lay pondering the words. "Julie is her name, perhaps that is it. What a funny little creature. I suppose she must be the nurse. It's so inter-

esting to watch her. I'm sure I'd forget all about being ill if she took care of me."

It was not long before Julie reappeared with a tray on which were a cup of cocoa and a plate with a roll and two very thin circles of butter. Mehitable sat up in bed and ate her breakfast slowly after Julie left her. She was disappointed in the cocoa. It was not at all what she had thought it would be. It was weak and gray and had an insipid taste, but she made the best of it and enjoyed the crisp brown rolls. They at least were like the rolls she had read about and because she loved to imagine she played that she was a great lady having her déjeuner in her boudoir. She had read of this in a French Revolution story she had found in the dingy little library at Cherryville. It was the first book to interest her in that strange, dreadful time so long ago.

When she finished breakfast she went to the window and peered out through the curtain. The sun shone through rows of chestnut trees that sheltered each side of the broad avenue. There was a flash of color in the distance, pink and mauve and crimson asters. She glanced back at her bed. The face of her doll smiled at her from the pillows—what if anyone should see her! She ran across the room, took Madeline in her arms and lifting the lid of her trunk laid her down among some warm winter petticoats. For several moments she stood looking down at the contents of her trunk. Oh, if only there were something very dainty and stylish to put on! But there was not, just a plain, brown, house dress. She brushed her hair very carefully and tied it back with a new brown hair ribbon. When she was dressed, she stood irresolutely in the center of the room for a moment. Why did they not come for her? Did they not know of her eagerness to see this world outside of her bedroom door? She opened the door and looked out.

A long, silent corridor, numbered doors on each side. At the far end of the hall there was a window of colored glass. The sun shone through it making prisms of light on the polished floor. Mehitable had never seen anything like it before. She went slowly along the corridor. Now and then a board creaked as she walked and she remembered how old the house was. She began to make a story about it and was brought suddenly back to earth by someone who came violently around the corner of the stairway. They caught each other and in some way steadied each other so that neither of them fell down. The impetuous newcomer was so breathless with emotion that she could only gasp for a moment or two, then she muttered, "The mean old cat—not you, my dear. I mean Miss Derk."

"Who is she?" asked Mehitable.

"She's everything that's cold and calm and sarcastic. She's the English mistress and she has just sent me out of class." She listened a moment after she spoke. "It's all right, I went around the garden way and through the petite salle à manger and upstairs. No one saw me."

She stood listening a moment longer, her head with its shock of short, straight hair on one side. As she spoke, Mehitable realized that the voice was familiar. It was the girl who had spoken on the stairs the night before.

"Are you Tip?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the other, looking at her keenly. "You're the new girl, aren't you? Where's your room? Let's go in, I can stay a few minutes and sort of get acquainted. Yes, I'm Tip," she added, "how did you know?"

They were walking now towards Mehitable's room. There was a hint of mischief in Mehitable's smile as she answered. "I thought your voice sounded familiar." They had come inside the room and closed the door and stood facing each other.

Almost involuntarily Mehitable's eyes turned towards the old brown valise that stood near the window.

Tip's tanned little face flushed scarlet. She had light colored eyes and very light eyebrows and a shock of brown hair. She wore a trim little blue tailored skirt and a frilly white blouse.

"You—you heard what I said last night on the stairs," she stammered. Mehitable felt sorry for her at once and ashamed that she had made her uncomfortable. She laughed. "It *is* a funny bag; it *was* my grandmother's and it's lain up garret for years at home. I know it's as old fashioned as can be."

Tip interrupted her. She had seated herself on the edge of the trunk. "It's my miserable quick tongue. Clythie said you'd hear, but I didn't believe her."

"Who is Clythie?" broke in Mehitable, anxious to change the subject.

"Clythie is—oh, you'll see for yourself soon. Clythie is beautiful, but that doesn't describe her. Where is your home?" added Tip.

"Cherryville, Vermont."

"Cherryville—what a funny name!" Tip threw back her head and laughed. "I never heard of it," she added. Mehitable felt her cheeks burning. A great rush of love and longing came over her for the far-away Cherryville of which Tip had never heard.

"There are lots of places I've never heard of," put in Tip hastily. "I mean small home towns. My home has been just anywhere, hotels, trains and boats, mostly; Shepard's Hotel in Cairo for a year, or the Riviera, or a bungalow in Santa Barbara, and last summer the Austrian Tyrol. Mother's restless," she added simply.

Just then there came a rap on the door and like a flash Tip

disappeared under the frilled white flounce of the bed. Mehitable stood facing the door as it opened and tried to keep her eyes away from the quivering flounce, as Madame Bourget came into the room. She was as jolly and smiling as the night before.

"Tiens, Petite," she said, kissing Mehitable on both cheeks in true French fashion. "All dressed and ready. You are not too tired then after your journey? Come, I will take you to the salle d'étude." Mehitable followed her down the long corridor and they went down the great winding stairway across the hall, through an anteroom to a large glass inclosed veranda. A group of girls sat about a table at one end and with them was the severe looking governess who had put out the light the night before. Madame Bourget explained to Mehitable that that was "le classe particulaire"—"For those who know no French," she said. She opened the door as she spoke and for a moment Mehitable stood hesitating on the threshold of the schoolroom. It was a long room, so long that the late September sun streaming in the windows at the far end seem faint and dreamlike.

It was only for a moment that they stood there on the threshold, but in after years she always remembered the first glimpse of the salle d'étude, the pale sunlight, the rows and rows of black walnut desks and the faces of the girls uplifted at the sound of the opening of the door. A woman at a desk on a raised platform near the door looked up at them. It was Mademoiselle Denton, the head mistress. Mehitable followed Madame Bourget far down the room to the last desk in the last row.

"This is your desk, petite. You are in the class particulaire, as you know no French. The hour is just over now, but your teacher will come to you soon."

She walked off quickly and Mehitable was left alone on the back row. She folded her hands on the desk and looked about her. So many girls! Was Una O'Hara in the room, she wondered. If so, would she recognize her? She saw her in her mind, standing in her red cloak in the moonlight. How she wanted just a glimpse of her! Yes—no—yes, that was she, that was Una, she sat at a desk in the row next to the front. She turned her head and smiled at Mehitable over her shoulder, more than that, she audaciously waved her hand. The head mistress at the desk had just missed seeing her. She raised her head a moment afterwards.

It was all very exciting. Mehitable longed to be really in it all, in the midst of the work and play, not just a strange outsider. "Some day," she thought to herself, "I'll be so sorry for the new girls."

Just then a bell rang sharply. The girls pushed their books inside their desks and stood up. Doors at the side of the room opened hastily and more girls appeared from the various classrooms. They gathered in groups, talking until a quick voice called, "Tout le monde pour le promenade." Just then some one came running up to Mehitable and caught her arm. It was Tip.

"Come and walk with me on the promenade, three may walk together. I've promised Jane Dascrow, but you may come too."

She had taken Mehitable's hand and they hurried through the veranda and up the stairs. Mehitable forgot her loneliness of a few moments before. She was going out to see Paris for the first time. Five minutes later they were walking down the gravel path that led to the green door in the wall. When they stepped out on the Boulevard Victor Hugo, Mehitable said to herself, "Now I'm in Paris." The school had seemed

a world of its own. Jane Dascrow, the other walking companion, was a thin, wiry, foreign-looking girl with black hair that fell in curls about her shoulders. She shrugged her shoulders as she talked.

"Stupid people that practice stupid exercises. Oh, I could not do it for hours and hours at a time. No, no, when I play it is my joy. I work, yes, sometimes when I feel the thrill in my soul," she remarked in French tc Tip as they walked along the quiet avenue.

Tip turned to Mehitable. "I may speak English with you just this once, but you'll have to hurry and learn French right away for we all speak it all the time and there is always a frightful row if we're caught chatting in our own tongue. I cornered Madame herself this morning after class and she gave me permission to speak English on the prom. if I took a new girl with me—that's one reason I asked you to walk with me," she added frankly.

Mehitable smiled at this as she looked with interest at Janey. "She doesn't speak English," explained Tip. "She is a Roumanian and she plays the piano! Well, wait until you hear her play. They say that she is a genius!"

To Mehitable this was all very thrilling, to be walking with a genius and to be seeing Paris for the first time!

They had come to the end of the avenue with its shady trees and stately houses and were passing an open café, where men and women sat at small green tables under striped awnings, eating and drinking busily, seeming quite unconscious of the people that passed so close to them. They went through the great gate, the same one Mehitable had driven through the night before, and soon found themselves on the Avenue du Bois. There was color everywhere. Old women selling bunches of purple and crimson asters, sunshine, the crisp

sound of horses' hoofs on the pavement as gay groups on horseback disappeared among the shadowy greenness of the Bois itself. The flash of motors, gray and blue and crimson, the long dimness of the great Boulevard, scent of late flowers and falling leaves, and everywhere children playing. Mehitable was silent from sheer delight in it all, but Tip talked continually.

"I've such a short time to speak English and must make the best of it," she was saying. "I thought you would be asking me all sorts of questions and you are as silent as a mouse. What is it, I wonder. What makes you so quiet?"

"It's Paris," answered Mehitable softly. She wanted to say much more. How she had dreamed of it all for so long over there in the dusky barn loft at Cherryville, but somehow she could not. Una would have understood, but matter-of-fact Tip would not.

"It's tiresome enough after you've walked this stupid avenue for weeks at a time," Tip was saying. "We're not allowed to buy as much as a post card or a biscuit. It's tantalizing. We're always famished at this hour of the day."

Someone called sharply and they turned homeward. Mehitable caught Tip's hand as they entered the green door leading to the Chateau. "I'm trying not to be afraid, Tip," she said, "but there are so many girls. I'm glad I know you and thank you for the walk." Tip reassured her as they walked around the corner of the house.

"Oh, it will all seem an old story to you very soon," she said reassuringly. "She's a little homesick," she added, turning to Janey, who had been rather bored during the walk as Tip had talked so constantly in English to Mehitable.

"You will soon speak the French," she said kindly to

Mehitable, these being about all the English words she knew.

"There are a number of Americans here. Clythie is one, and she is lovely—there she is now," and Tip called out, "Clythie!"

They were at the back of the Chateau, and along one side of the garden there was a long brick building. Clythie stood in its vine-covered doorway. Other girls were running in and out, calling back and forth to each other, but Clythie stood still in the sunshine. Her hair looked like bronze, her eyes were blue and smiling, she held a sheaf of autumn leaves in one hand and waved them at the girls as they approached.

Tip made a low bow, spreading out her hands. "This is Mehitable Webster, and she comes from our illustrious country. Miss Webster—Miss Grey."

Someone called Tip just then, and she ran inside, pulling off her jacket as she ran. Clythie smiled and held out here hand to Mehitable.

"I'm glad you've come," she said. "Where is your home?"

"Cherryville, Vermont." Mehitable felt suddenly shy and at a loss for words. It had been so easy to talk to Una. Why was it that she could think of nothing beyond this to say? Why did she become conscious of her brown skirt that was too long, conscious of the fact that she was a very plain, freckled little country girl?

Tip reappeared in the doorway. "We've only five minutes to tidy up for lunch. Come, girls."

The three walked through the house and on up the wide stairway. Someone called to them from above. It was Una. Her soft silver red hair fell about her shoulders as she looked down at them. Clythie looked up at her as she turned at the top of the second flight to go to her room.

"I've seen Madame about the play. She says we may have one if we can only find the right thing," Una called. "There must be a witch in the play we choose, for I'm perishing to be a witch," she added.

Una put her arm through Mehitable's when they met at the top step and asked her to walk with her at recreation. So Mehitable had that to look forward to all the afternoon. At lunch she sat at a table at the other end of the room from Una and Tip, and next to a pretty, forlorn-looking newcomer, an American girl who had just arrived. Mehitable's heart ached for her, for she was so homesick that the tears dropped into her soup as she tried to eat it.

"I'm new, too, and I know just how you feel," Mehitable whispered to her. "They say we'll feel quite all right after a few days."

"Oh, I shall never be able to stay here. It is dreadful. Mutton for lunch, and that awful teacher glaring at us through the meal. Oh, New York, it's the only place in the world. Theatres and bridge; luncheons and dances. This life will kill me!"

Mehitable looked at her in astonishment. Looked at her pretty, rather stupid face, at her charming blue frock. Could it be true that anyone could find this wonderful new life anything but thrilling and interesting, no matter how homesick they might be? Gladys, this New York girl, might be uninteresting to most people, but she was quite a new type to Mehitable. New York, theatres, dancing—Gladys had known all this! At the end of the meal they had become quite well acquainted and Gladys, though in no way understanding Mehitable's enthusiasm about the life they were to lead at the Chateau, began at least to have a faint interest in it.

There was no class for Mehitable that afternoon and she sat at her desk looking over her new neat copy books that Mademoiselle Gerauld, her teacher, had brought to her. They all had different colored covers, pink, blue, green and yellow. Mademoiselle Gerauld had explained to her that she had missed the morning class and that as her schedule had not yet been arranged she would have no class until the next day. She gave her quite a long list of French words to learn, with the English meanings written beside them. Mehitable was very eager to learn the language, enough to enter into things quickly with her schoolmates, so that she applied herself to the long row and decided that she had memorized most of them when the recreation bell rang.

Una came running up to her almost at once after the bell rang. She wore a close fitting cloak of dark green and held a cape on her arm. "Come into the garden," she said, and they walked down the long schoolroom and stepped out of the open French window at the far end, into the garden.

The incidents of that first day came back to Mehitable many times, but of them all the walk with Una in the garden stood out the most vividly, the long gravel paths winding in and out, the beds of brilliant asters, the great old trees, and the sunlight flickering on the old stone wall that encircled the garden. There were sudden little groups of trees, dark retreats from the sun and color outside, girls everywhere, walking by twos or in groups, their voices echoing through the old garden.

And Una! She walked lightly and gracefully, her hair falling about her shoulders. In the late September sun she looked less pale than the night before. There was a breath of tan on her cheeks and her small hands were hard and brown.

Her voice was like threads of silk, Mehitable thought, or no, a strain of music, Celtic music. She was speaking of the garden.

"It's so small, it hedges one in so. It's only a picture garden."

"To me it is very beautiful," said Mehitable, "like the garden in a fairy story."

Una looked at her keenly. What an odd little figure she was, she thought, in her quaint, brown dress, so different from the other Americans. "And yet she understands. She's different that way too."

"You'll see our garden some day, I hope. Oh, I'm not boasting," she added quickly, her hand on Mehitable's shoulder. "Our garden is very shabby, really, I suppose. There is only old Daniels to see to it all alone, but it's free, free! One can run and run and almost never reach the end, and, oh, the roses and the early springtime." She paused. "I've only seen you twice, yet I talk to you of home. I never do to the others."

"Go on, go on, don't stop."

"I must, it's tea time. We're famished, both of us." She took Mehitable's hand and ran with her around the corner of the house, through the veranda to the dining room.

"We can sit anywhere at tea. Come here by me," said Una, and they sat down at a table at the door where Clythie and Tip soon joined them.

There was no governess at the table and a maid poured the tea. There was plenty of bread and a strange dark mixture in a glass dish which went by the name of "treacle." "It's really not bad. Try it," urged Una, spreading some on her bread. "At the English school where by cousins go they have it only twice a week."

"Treacle," muttered Tip, refusing the dish with a wave of her hand. "Treacle is an abomination."

Mehitable spread some on her bread and tasted it. "Why, it's like molasses," she said, "only not so good."

"Tip pretends to hate the Chateau," explained Una, "but she loves it, really. When her mother offered to take her with her to Egypt this winter, she refused to go."

"Oh, the Chateau is second nature," answered Tip. "I'm so used to it. Besides I like the fun of breaking rules."

Mehitable gazed at Tip. "You refused to go to Egypt?" she asked.

"Goodness, yes, I've been there three times. Oh, the Chateau is not so bad if you know how to manage. By the way, Una," Tip lowered her voice, leaning forward, as she spoke, "what about the midnight feast?"

"Hush," answered Una softly, "Mademoiselle Gerauld is at the next table, she might catch a word. Saturday night in the tapestry room." Then she turned and looked at Mehitable. "It's a feast we're planning in the long Gallery. It will be very thrilling. It's a great secret."

A bell rang and they rushed off to their different classes.

At dinner that night Mehitable was too occupied in trying to cheer her homesick neighbor, Gladys, to realize that she herself was beginning to have some symptoms of that malady. It was not until prayers at nine-thirty when they were all assembled in the great salle d'étude that she felt a lump rising in her throat. So many, many people around her, all speaking a language she did not understand. The room vanished for a moment in a blur of tears. Madame came up to the desk on the platform and read a short passage in French from a Testament and said a prayer in French. It was the first time she had appeared that day. She was an imposing figure standing there in her black velvet gown.

A girl called Jean, who seemed to be a friend of Clythie Grey's, played the organ and they all sang an English hymn.

It comforted Mehitable and all her life she loved it. After she was in bed and Mademoiselle had put out the light, she thought of it. "The day Thou gavest Lord, is ended." She was too sleepy to lie awake. Her last thought was of what Una had said in the garden, "Some day I hope you will see our garden." Una's garden in Ireland! Could anything so wonderful ever be really true! Then she fell asleep.

CHAPTER X

PHILLIPPE

Those first few days at the Chateau always seemed a confused dream to Mehitable, so many, many new faces and thoughts and thrills. The school work seemed all copy books at first. Grave looking Madame Gerauld showed her what to write at the top of each, les verbes, les dictees, la traduction, la grammaire—Mehitable wanted to work hard, at least she thought she did. It was all so new and interesting. She had never been very much of a student at the Cherryville school, for she had dreamed so much, but here at the Chateau she felt that it would be quite different. She wanted most earnestly to speak French and that, in itself, was an incentive for work.

It was a mixture of discouragement and excitement. She and a few other homesick new girls struggled drearily over new sentences and words. Mademoiselle Gerauld was very serious and she could see nothing but tragedy in the deplorable ignorance of her young pupils. The humor and pathos of their efforts did not touch her. At the end of the third day, Mehitable's roommate had not arrived, and it was at night that she felt most lonely until she fell asleep. Tip had tiptoed in one night with a handful of peppermints and had stayed a few moments, talking in stifled whispers.

"Mademoiselle Gerauld is prowling around, so I can only stay a second," she had whispered.

The brief visit had cheered her. Unfortunately, Una had had a sudden attack of neuralgia and had gone to the infirmary

for a day or so. Mehitable was wishing for her on the afternoon of the third day after her arrival. It was recreation hour. Tip was nowhere to be seen. She saw Clythie and her friend Jean start for a walk in the garden. They had smiled at her and spoken kindly, but they had not asked her to join them. She walked slowly down the corridor below the Long Gallery. The sunlight flickered through the latticed windows. She was alone. Everyone was outside in the sunlight. She took a letter from her pocket and read it for the fourth time. It had come that day and was from Barbara. Tears blurred her eyes for a moment as she re-read it.

Barbara and she having supper on the north porch; Desire's voice floating in from the kitchen singing, "Beautiful words, wonderful words of Life." Oh! How far away it all seemed. Barbara's letter had told of the first days after she had left; of how Patchwork had adopted her in Mehitable's absence; of how Desire was already planning a Christmas box to send her. She had reached the end of the corridor and stood there uncertainly for a moment as she folded the letter and put it in her pocket. On one side was a door leading to the garden and on the other a door that led to the old part of the Chateau.

"There are many rooms that we have never seen," Una had said. "The oldest part of the Chateau is always locked. I've always thought I'd explore it some day, if I could," she had added.

"To explore the old Chateau." Could anything be more entrancing! Mehitable turned the knob of the door and found that it yielded. Una had said that it was always locked, but it turned quite easily for Mehitable and almost before she knew it, she was on the other side of it. There was a dim, gray light everywhere. Twilight creeping through open doors on one side of the hall. She peered in at the first door she

came to. A huge, empty room met her gaze. She went inside and stood silently in the center of the room and looked about her. There were faded gray curtains at the windows, very old and tattered. Faint light crept in through them. There were no furnishings in the room, except two long gilt mirrors, one at each end. She saw her little brown figure reflected in one and it gave her quite a start.

"No one goes to the old part," Una had said. "As far as I know, no one has ever gone. It is almost always locked and anyway the girls are afraid of it."

"Afraid of what?" Mehitable had asked.

"Oh, of the oldness of it all. I'm not afraid," Una had added, "I'm used to old things."

Mehitable walked very slowly across the great room. She stopped at the far end and looked back, then she passed on to the apartment beyond. There were gilt mirrors here and a gleaming chandelier hung from the ceiling. It had evidently been carefully cleaned. No dust of the ages seemed to cling about it.

"It is so beautiful," thought Mehitable. "It holds so many secrets. The whole Chateau is full of secrets, it is wonderful."

Chairs stood against the walls, ghostly in the fading light. On the walls were pictures shrouded in white. There was a chill in the air here, something almost sinister. Mehitable passed on quickly to the room beyond. It was small and almost empty and it led on to a hallway. A flight of stairs faced the door and Mehitable began slowly to ascend them. She had forgotten the school, forgotten that she was breaking rules. She was excited beyond words. She was doing what she had so often dreamed of doing wandering alone through an old, old castle. This old stairway was part of the dream. A room faced the top of the stairway. There was

no door to it and one could see way across it as one came up the stairs. Mehitable hesitated a moment on the threshold, then went inside. There was an old spinnet in one corner and at the windows were long velvet curtains faded from dark red to faint rose.

"It must have been a ballroom," thought Mehitable. Strange things have happened here, things I can know nothing about." She danced slowly about the room, humming a tune. She was a grande dame of a hundred years ago dancing with her cavalier!

Suddenly she paused. Someone was singing! She crept near the open door at the other end of the room and listened. A young voice floated toward her from the room beyond. A boy's soprano voice singing in English:

Speed, bonny boat, like a bird on the wing,
Onward, the sailors cry,
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye.

A bright fire burned in a wide fireplace in a far corner of the room. It was a liveable room with warm, velvet hangings at the long windows, and heavy carved chairs and tables scattered about. A piano stood near the window and leaning against it, his arms outstretched upon it, stood a boy. Just as Mehitable turned to go back, he looked up, stopped singing, and spoke quickly.

"Who's that?" he asked and even in her bewilderment, Mehitable felt surprised at his speaking English.

She felt suddenly ashamed to have been discovered, to seem to be curiously looking in at someone's room. It had all been so dreamlike and unreal, the empty rooms breathing secrets, the twisted stairway, the stories she was weaving about it all, but this was different, this was someone's own special

room, and a strange boy was its owner. She had no real right there.

The boy crossed the room. He wore a riding suit of rough tweeds, and carried a whip and cap in his hand. He threw them on a chair as he came up to Mehitable.

"But come in, won't you Mademoiselle?" he said. "Now that you are here, why not come a little farther?"

"I'm—it's so wrong of me—I'm breaking the rules, but I so wanted to see what was on the other side of the door."

The boy threw back his head and laughed. "I too," he said, "have also wanted to see what was on the other side of the door. Your side I mean, you're one of my grandmother's pupils aren't you?" He pushed a chair forward, "Won't you sit down?" he asked with a bow.

Mehitable could see that he was laughing at her, but she was too interested now to care. She sat down on the chair he offered her and looked rather timidly about. Suddenly an awful thought came to her. What if Madame should suddenly appear? As though he understood her fear, the boy said hastily. "My grandmother is in Paris, and my tutor is lying down with a toothache. I'm no end sorry for him, but it means I won't have to dig away at geometry for an hour or so."

Mehitable had taken a quick glance around the room as he spoke. There were many pictures on the wall and one of a man with piercing dark eyes like Madame's, faced her. She glanced from it to the boy. How alike the eyes were of all three of them! He sat on the edge of the table and looked at her smilingly.

"Well," he said, "you have a good deal of courage, haven't you?"

"I don't know," answered Mehitable. "I hadn't thought of

it that way. I—I've had such a good time—it's all so wonderful to me."

"What is wonderful?" asked the boy.

"Being over here—the castle, the girls, the newness of it all—I've only just come."

Before she knew it, Mehitable found herself telling the strange boy about Cherryville, Barbara, Robin and Johnnie. She never could quite make out afterward how she had had the courage to do it, but he had asked her a number of questions and out of her loneliness she had told him of the dear friends at home, of the hollow in the wood where they made the picnic fires, of the hill and the school and the woods. He had seemed so interested.

"I'd like to know Robin," he said, "They all seem a jolly lot and what good times you've had." He spoke rather wistfully and added, "I'm going to have quite a different life from this some day, I can tell you that. I'm going to be free some day," he added restlessly.

He got down from the table and walked over to the fire. A dog lying on a rug in front of it, stood up and came close to him. He put his hand on the dog's head and stood silent for some minutes.

Mehitable sat watching him rather timidly. He was a boy of perhaps fourteen. He had very fair hair but his eyes were like the eyes in the picture before her. Suddenly he turned toward her, smiling, his very engaging smile.

"You know, it's rather nice that you came to-day, I was feeling—well a bit lonely. One does now and then. I want to be in school, you know, doing things with other boys. Oh, I'm so tired of being here."

Mehitable wanted to ask him why he was there and why he could not go to school, but something held her back.

"My name's Phillippe. What's yours?" he asked.

Phillippe. What a pretty name. How Mehitable hated to tell him hers! He said it over gravely after her.

"Meheetible, what an odd name—what a pretty one," he said.

She gazed at him in astonishment. He was quite serious. He meant it, and the way he had pronounced it had somehow taken all the ugliness out of it. They looked at each other and smiled and Mehitable said impulsively.

"This is a great adventure for me. You see I'm quite new at the Castle. I'm so new anyway, I've never been anywhere, just Cherryville always, and I've dreamed and dreamed of doing things like this. Do you know, I think I feel differently about the Chateau. I mean the other girls cannot feel the same. Even Una has always known old things, she is used to them, but for me it is all so strange and wonderful."

"None of the others seem to care about anything, but that stuffy little garden. Oh, I've seen them from the tower window."

"Do you live here all the time?" Mehitable ventured to ask.

The boy was silent for a moment, and she regretted having spoken.

Phillippe looked at Mehitable for a moment and then said slowly, "My grandmother does not want people to know I am here. I do not know why. It is all a mystery to me, but it is in some way connected with my father," he glanced at the picture on the wall as he spoke.

"And your mother?" Mehitable's question was born of an interest so deep that she spoke before she thought.

Phillippe turned his head away and looked in the fire for an instant, then said in a low voice, "Mother is in England,

that is why I'm here with grandmother. Mother is English," he added.

He came back to the table and sat on the edge, his hands clasped about his knees. He was smiling, though there was a wistful look in his eyes. "How I want my horse, Quiver. I think of him every day. I want to ride and ride and ride, not just these stupid canters in the Bois, but miles and miles across country, over the moors. Have you ever seen a moor?"

Mehitable shook her head. "No, but I shall some day." Anything seemed possible to her just then. Her heart beat high with the joy of adventure. A clock struck somewhere and she stood up suddenly. "Oh, it is late I know, and I'm here so far from school. It's been such a happy time." She held out her hand rather shyly to say goodbye.

Phillippe jumped down off the table and walked toward the door with her. "I'll see you back as far as the door," he said. "What if it should be locked now?" he added mischievously, as they walked slowly down the stairs and through the great silent rooms below.

Mehitable smiled a little ruefully. "It would mean trouble for me, but anyway I should have had my adventure," she said.

"You need not worry," Phillippe reassured her. "I know a secret way and if the door is locked I'll let you know it too."

This last mysterious remark so interested Mehitable that she was almost disappointed to find the door moved easily when Phillippe tried it. A mop and pail stood near the door. Evidently the cleaning woman had spent a long time at her tea in the servants' room downstairs. Phillippe stood with his hand on the door and looked at Mehitable.

"Won't you come again?" he asked. "I'm so lonely. Grandmother's kind but she's away so much. Biggs is a good

chap but he's so old. If you'll come again I'll tell you a great deal about the old part of the Chateau, and I'll show you things," he added mysteriously.

Mehitable clasped her hands together in her earnest way, when especially excited. "Oh, may I come again? Will you tell me about the Chateau? You see I'm thinking stories of it all the time. I shall love to come, but it's breaking rules," she added.

"Never mind, it cannot harm anyone and no one need know. The woman cleans the old part on Thursdays and the door will probably be unlocked. Do come as soon as you can. Oh, I'll have so many things to show you."

Mehitable nodded but did not speak for she thought she heard a sound. She stepped outside and Phillippe closed the door softly behind her. She ran swiftly down the long dusky corridor, up the marble steps and through the glass veranda. The last class of the day was just over and she followed a stream of girls up the stairs. Una caught up with her and they went on to the third floor arm in arm. Una's neuralgia was better and Mehitable was glad to see her back, but she was so engrossed in thinking of her recent adventure that she scarcely heard all that she said. She longed to tell her about it, but it was a secret between herself and Phillippe. He had said that his grandmother had not wished his living there to be known, for what reason neither of them knew, so she must keep silent about it. After all it was very thrilling to have such a secret all to one's self, however lonely she might be. Whatever happened, she had had a most charming adventure.

"You're to be invited to the midnight feast on Saturday night," whispered Una as she left Mehitable at her door. This was news indeed and Mehitable felt grateful to Una.

"She asked Clythie if I might come," she thought as she changed her dress for dinner. Already Mehitable saw who was the leader at the Chateau. Everything must be approved by Clythie. After dinner Una came up to Mehitable and asked her to walk in the Long Gallery. The girls were allowed to walk there for a half hour in the evening before study hour. It was moonlight and the garden outside the latticed corridor windows was nearly as bright as day.

Mehitable and Una were not alone. A very quaint little figure walked with them. Mehitable had noticed her several times. She was a little Japanese who looked odd and bewitching in her dark embroidered kimona. Her name was Chiona. It was her second year at the Chateau and she was a great friend of Clythie, Una, and their particular crowd, that is, she was with them a great deal and was growing used to their ways and conversation, but Mehitable felt at once that they all seemed very strange to her.

"I'm sure she is thinking all the time how very different it is from Japan and yet she knows we could never understand no matter how much she should try to tell us," thought Mehitable as the three paced the ghostly corridor together. "Some day I mean to ask her about her other life at home."

Chiona was going to the midnight feast. It was to be a very much more daring feat than they had yet attempted and there was a great deal of suppressed excitement in the air. Una was full of the subject. "The feast is to be upstairs you know, in the Long Gallery. The Slowburns are coming. You see they live nearby or rather their mother has taken a house here in Neuilly, and so they are going to make sandwiches for us. It's so dreadfully hard to get in food here, but Tip has promised to buy olives and sardines when she goes to the matinée with her mother's friend, Saturday afternoon,

and you and I," she added turning to Mehitable, "must manage somehow to buy a cake when we go into Paris Saturday. You'll go, won't you, Mehitable?" she asked. "We're allowed to go, three of us with a governess, Saturday afternoons. We'll do a museum and then have tea. It will be so exciting, buying the cake, and very difficult to manage," she added.

Indeed Mehitable would go. Paris! She lay awake for a half hour that night going over in her mind the exciting events of the day, the old rooms, the gray satin-covered chairs, so stiff and old, standing against the wall, the lilt of the Scotch song that Phillippe had sung, Phillippe himself, his promise to show her the old secrets that he knew about, the wonders of this strange, whispering old castle.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONCIERGERIE—AND A CAKE

Mehitable's class in English Literature was the first class in the morning. It was quite different from the French classes and very much more interesting, partly because they were beginning to study all sorts of wonderful poems; mostly because of that, but also because of the English mistress. To Mehitable she was a study; she had begun to wonder about her at the first lesson and on Saturday morning, the day of the half holiday, was still wondering. The teacher's name was Miss Derk. She was quite young and had a plain dark face. She never smiled and Mehitable wondered if she ever could. "Her face is so still," she thought. "It is so cold and quiet, it is almost cruel." Miss Derk had a very low quiet voice, her French was poor but she was allowed to speak English to her pupils in her classes, and her voice was very quick and crisp in spite of its softness.

Gladys sat next to Mehitable. She was still very homesick and clung to her as an anchor in a strange and lonely sea. There were many older girls in the class for it was more or less an extra study at the Chateau; Clythie was there, and her friend Jean, and the Japanese girl Chiona, and the Slowburn twins, the two girls who were to furnish the sandwiches for the party. Even Tip was there and seemed for her, rather subdued. Mehitable sat with her hands folded on the table in front of her, listening. Miss Derk spoke well, she was telling them about the child life of Byron, of its pathos and loneliness; she told of the great old abbey where he had

spent his childhood; of his lameness and his sorrow that he could not do all that the boys did. She spoke in a cold, impersonal way, but instinct told Mehitable that it was because of her audience. "She thinks we do not care," she thought, "she thinks we cannot understand."

Clythie was scribbling a list of things she wanted to buy at the Gallerie Lafayette, on the back of her copy book. Tip was raising first one eyebrow and then the other in rather a comic way she had of doing. Gladys was as always, frankly bored. Una was smiling at Tip, but Una did not like Miss Derk, Mehitable remembered. She had said so. "Derk is a cross patch," she had remarked carelessly. "She's as cheerful as a tomb and as cordial as a glass of ice water. Clythie and I had her in English history, last year."

Mehitable was thinking of the class and of Miss Derk, as she, Una and Jean were journeying into Paris that afternoon. Fräulein was with them. They were in a very jolting horse cab and at every corner Fräulein was sure they would be run over. She would clutch the arm of Jean Macy who sat next to her, and peer nervously out of the window as motors whirled by them. Madame would not allow her pupils to ride in the Metropole, the underground, as there had been an accident there once, and so their progress into Paris was slow. They drove along some drab looking side streets to avoid the worst of the traffic and it grew monotonous, after a time. Mehitable's thoughts wandered to the English class of the morning; she had been very happy there and a deep sense of gratitude had come over her. One of her dreams was coming true, she was having lessons in Literature from a fine teacher. She felt sure that Miss Derk was that, and looked forward to the history class on Monday morning. Mehitable found the French classes rather a trial, her interest in French verbs

had vanished as quickly as it came, for it was drudgery trying to learn the first simple rules in "le classe particulaire." But the English that she could understand, the poets that she loved, this was different. There was so much she longed to know, so much she felt sure that Miss Derk could tell her.

The cab drove up in front of a huge gloomy looking building, and after they had stood for a moment looking at it in a rather awed silence, they went inside It was so gray, so still, that the October sunlight outside seemed far away. A grim, talkative old man in a dark uniform took them about. Mehitable wished he would be still now and then, and let them wander about in peace. She wanted to think and imagine things.

"It is whispering terrible secrets," she remarked to Una as they stood together looking in at the barred door of a long unused cell. "Think of it. This is where they were, hundreds of them brought here from beautiful homes and kept here until they were beheaded, girls like you and me," she added.

Una shuddered, "Hush, Mehitable," she entreated, "you make it all seem so real, so near, and it was really so long ago. Oh, it must have been a wonderful time after all. Think of saving someone's life, someone that you loved. Think of the escapes, the sacrifices."

They were following the guide down a very long, dark passage, and he paused suddenly before a low door in the stone wall, and waved his hand dramatically.

"It is here," he said, speaking in broken English, "It is here that the Queen Marie Antoinette made her bow to the people."

They stood in silence for some minutes looking at the low doorway through which the proud queen had been obliged to pass on her way to the cell which she never left until she

went to the guillotine. She who had said she would never bow her head to the people, had had to bow her head in order to pass under the low door. "Oh, the dreams and the friends and the happiness that she left behind her," thought Mehitable, "the loneliness of it all." Fräulein looked at her sharply. She herself was bored and tired and longing for a cup of tea. The Conciergerie was an old story to her.

"You are pale, Meehiteeble," she exclaimed. "This is no place for the jenne fille, it is too gloomy. Come, we will now go for tea."

The aged guide seemed offended that they were not going on through the rest of the old prison, and as a last bit of information, informed them that long before it had become a prison, it had been a very gay place, "le palais de la Cité," and in 1369 had been changed into a prison.

"How could anyone have ever been happy there," exclaimed Una, as they came out into the sunshine, glad to breathe in the fresh soft air, to see the gay flower stand on the street corner, and to know that a jolly little tea awaited them at Neal's on the rue de Rivoli.

"Yes," answered Mehitable. "It's the strangest thing to think that there was dancing there years ago, brocaded dresses and jewels and courtiers and love affairs."

Jean Macey laughed and glanced with some interest at Mehitable. "What an odd little thing she is to be sure," she thought, "and yet, how well she says things." She put her arm through Mehitable's as they crossed the crowded street. She was a gentle, charming-looking girl, not as pretty as Clythie, but with something in her face and eyes that Clythie lacked. Mehitable was very happy as they sat at a little table near the window in the English tea room above a bookshop on the rue de Rivoli, one of the few tea places where Madame

de Villiers would allow her pupils to go. It was only a small, quiet room, and there was generally a good deal of grumbling amongst the girls who longed for a glimpse of some of the very fashionable French places, but the toasted tea cakes at Neal's were very good and one could catch a glimpse of the tumultuous many colored street below, the most restless, extravagant, changeful street in the world. They had tea out of two fat little earthenwear teapots, and, with the tea, they had an eclair each,—a French eclair, so different from those of any other land, and a toasted tea cake. They could have eaten a great many, but it was against Madame's orders and Fräulein, in spite of her good nature, was always firm about enforcing Madame's rules. She could have eaten any number herself, but that would never do of course. They were quite a time over their tea and when they stood up to go, Una took Mehitable's arm.

"I must manage somehow to buy the cake. It's going to be a risk, but that's half the fun. You and Jean must try to keep Fräulein interested in something for a few minutes."

As she whispered this last instruction, she vanished in the crowd and Mehitable turned to Fräulein, who was counting her change, having just paid the waitress. "Look, Fräulein," she said. "What is that?"

She nodded toward a table near them where sat a stout lady and three stout, red-cheeked girls. A waitress had just put a huge cake down in front of one of them and she was beginning to cut it in large slices, while her table companions looked admiringly on. It was a very wonderful work of art and had evidently been made to order; it was topped with whipped cream and red cherries and had a most festive appearance. Fräulein looked at it almost sentimentally.

"It is a Geburtstag Küche (birthday cake)," she said. "It

is a German recipe, of that I am sure. Ah, yes, it makes me think of many happy days gone by." She shook her head sadly and then turned around suddenly. "Come, come, we must be getting home, I am afraid of the dark evenings; we must have the man at the door call a cab."

She glanced toward the counter where Una was standing, waiting for the precious mocha cake which the girl was putting in a paste-board box for her. A boy stood near her, a boy with very fair hair. He wore a gray coat and held his tweed cap in his hand. Mehitable recognized him at once. It was Phillippe. He was watching them and seemed to take in the situation at a glance for just as Fräulein turned toward Una and the girl handed the box across the counter, he took it from her; also the change which she handed with it. It was all done in the twinkling of an eye, and as Fräulein, seeing him take the cake, turned away, calling sharply to Una to follow them, he slipped the box and money into Una's hand and received her grateful thanks. "Oh, it was so good of you," she exclaimed, "you've saved the day. It's for a midnight feast," she explained in an excited whisper, as they made their way through the crowd. "Yes, I know," he whispered back, just then catching Mehitable's eye and smiling.

He had recognized them all, though only Mehitable knew who he was. It gave her an odd thrill as Una told her of the episode in excited whispers as they jolted home in the cab, and Fräulein was deep in an account of her last attack of rheumatism to Jean.

They managed to conceal the cake from Fräulein's eyes and breathed a sigh of relief when they had it safely hidden in its box under the pillow of Una's bed. She and Jean talked a great deal about the strange boy who had so cleverly come to their rescue, wondering who he might be, but never a

word said Mehitable. She had longed to tell Una of her adventure in the old part of the Chateau, but Phillippe had spoken as though his being there was a secret and she had not felt that it was right for her to tell. She opened the door of her room in great haste for they had only a very few moments to get ready for dinner, closed the door after her, and stood looking in astonishment at a small figure who sat rather dejectedly on the edge of the far bed, a girl with sandy hair and spectacles, who sat with her hands clasped about her knees and fairly glared at Mehitable as she bounced into the room.

"Are you my roommate?" she inquired with a broad Scotch accent.

Mehitable nodded, "Yes, I'm so glad you've come, I've been pretty lonely without a roommate."

"Well I hope you're tidy" the other answered. "If there's anything I can't abide, it's untidiness and flightiness, it fashes me a good bit."

The bell rang as she spoke and Mehitable had only time to smooth her hair. The two went out of the room together and down the stairs. The new roommate, in a few words, had showed herself to be an independent character. She had had a very rough voyage across from Scotland, she told Mehitable, but she rather enjoyed it, as she was never seasick. She did not expect to enjoy herself at all at the Chateau; it wasn't what she was there for; she was sure she would not like the girls; she never had liked girls and was equally sure they would not like her and it was to her a matter of the most complete indifference whether they did or not.

By this time they were at the dining room door, and as most new girls were put at Madame's table, Nancy found herself next to Mehitable, on the other side of whom was Gladys. At a far table Una and Clythie and Jean were talk-

ing in low excited tones, at the same time trying to appear as calm as possible. As a matter of fact they were keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. Never before had anything so daring as a feast in the Long Gallery been planned. If they were caught, the consequences would indeed be serious; all of them were a little frightened except perhaps Una, whose Irish love of risk and danger was far greater than her prudence. Mehitable had always wanted to go to a midnight feast. She had read about them and now she was actually going to one. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined anything like the Long Gallery or anything as daring as a midnight revel there.

Her new roommate's name was Nancy Græme, and in spite of her outspoken brusque manner, Mehitable liked her at once. In the first place she was Scotch, more Scotch th .n anything Mehitable could even imagine. Her very burr was fascinating. What matter if she squinted and had red hair. She had the background of all Scotland behind her. Mehitable wanted to ply her with questions, but was shy about doing so. However, the newcomer was quite outspoken and made no secret of her affairs.

"We're plain folks, Presbyterians all of us, prayers twice a day. There's but my two aunts and my grandfather and me and we live a good bit out in the country. We don't see anyone but the minister from one week's end to the other."

Gladys gasped at this, and Nancy turned and looked at her as though seeing her for the first time.

"Don't you die with loneliness?" queried Gladys. "How can you live without any fun? This place is bad enough with nowhere to go and nothing to do, but to be alone in the country with aunts and seeing only the minister!"

Gladys regarded her with undisguised compassion. Nancy

returned her gaze calmly and disapprovingly. "Well, now what's fashing you, Miss America?" she asked; Glady's accent being unmistakable. "Suppose I like the old aunts and the minister and suppose I've other things to think of besides flitting my time away on foolish what-nots?"

"Gladys has always lived in a city," put in Mehitable soothingly. "In New York, and she's done all sorts of things we haven't been allowed to do,—theatres and lunch parties," she added.

Gladys looked at her gratefully. Mehitable was her only friend so far and she was beginning to appreciate her.

"Is that so!" exclaimed Nancy with some sharpness. "Well, if she lived on oat cakes and porridge and tea for a while and learned to respect the old and the clergy, it would do her no end of good, I'm sure."

There was a twinkle in her eye as she spoke, and Mehitable made up her mind that she had a sense of humor after all. Gladys grumbled over the mutton and cauliflower and told Mehitable about a wonderful ice cream she had just before coming away—pistache, marrons, and whipped cream on top. This made Mehitable think of the birthday cake in the tea room and of Phillippe's timely help about the mocha cake. The midnight feast: it would mean that she must leave Nancy on her first night at school; to be sure, Nancy was a very independent young lady and would at least pretend not to care, but it seemed selfish. Gladys too, how truly miserable she was. Why could she not go too? Would she dare to ask Clythie if they might go? She knew that it was only through Una that she herself had been invited.

After dinner she stood alone for a moment in the glass veranda until she saw Clythie, Jean and Una come slowly out of the dining room, then she went up to them. Her

cheeks burned and she stammered slightly as she spoke to Clythie who smiled kindly at her. Mehitable looked up at her bravely; it was foolish of course to be timid, but somehow she could not help it.

"If they promise to be careful could my new roommate, Nancy Græme, and Gladys Chester come too? She's very homesick."

"Heaven forbid," exclaimed Clythie, raising her eyebrows, "We don't want two green, timid girls on our hands, this is a great risk any way."

"Oh, two more won't make any difference. Let them come if they want to," said hospitable Una, and Mehitable gave her a grateful look. Clythie frowned. "We can't run the risk of their blurting out about it. As one of them is your roommate," she said looking at Mehitable, "it will be difficult to keep her from knowing. It's very unfortunate—but yes, if you can make them understand they must be absolutely silent and do just as we tell them, they may come. It seems unavoidable about your roommate, but that fat Gladys is sure to do something stupid."

"She isn't so stupid, really," Mehitable answered, rather more boldly than usual. A sudden thought came to her about Nancy who had confided to her in a softened moment at dinner that she had some short bread. "Nancy has a box of short bread," said she, "perhaps she'll bring it to the feast." This was greeted with enthusiasm by all but Clythie, for Scotch short bread was a delicacy greatly appreciated by all Chateau girls.

As a matter of fact, Clythie was greatly worried. Twice she had come to Una during the day and suggested giving up the plan. It was, she said, "a wild one that might easily end in disaster." But this only increased Una's delight in the

whole daring of the enterprise and she had laughed at Clythie's fears.

"Ah, you're nervous, macushla," she said reassuringly. "It will be a rare bit of fun and the fairies will watch over us."

Clythie had shrugged her shoulders at this last, but had given in. The evening passed away somehow and they all went quietly to their rooms as usual.

CHAPTER XII

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST

"Be ready at the end of the landing when the cuckoo clock strikes twelve," Una had said.

"When the cuckoo clock strikes twelve"—how thrilling it was. Mehitable shut the door of her room and stood with her back against it for a moment too excited almost to speak.

"Oh, Nancy," she exclaimed breathlessly to that young person, who in a magenta colored dressing gown, was combing out her sandy locks. "You're invited to the midnight feast to-night. Oh, I'm so glad. You'll come, won't you?" Somehow the possibility of anyone refusing so tempting an invitation had not occured to her. "It's to be in the Long Gallery, but of course you don't know about that, do you? It's to be the greatest fun." Mehitable paused and looked rather anxiously at Nancy, who went on very calmly with her hair brushing.

"Now, what nonsense is this? Who wants to gallavant around this cold spooky old place in the middle of the night? I've had a good, sensible dinner, and I'm going to bed." She turned and looked rather severely at Mehitable. "I've come here to learn to speak French and teach it. If you can fritter away your time and get into a scrape the first thing, do so."

Mehitable felt very guilty for a moment. She too was at the Chateau to make the best of every hour. For a second the face of Aunt Comfort rose before her, but the next second she smiled and came close to Nancy, and it was a very naughty Mehitable who spoke.

"You're afraid."

Nancy glared at her for a moment, and then said simply, "I'm not afraid and I'll go."

Mehitable put her arm on Nancy's shoulder. "I'm ashamed to have said that," she said. "Of course your not afraid. It's only that I wanted you to go so much. I asked Clythie if you could."

Nancy softened somewhat. "That was good of you," she said, and from then on entered into the experience with the same energy with which those who came to know her at the Chateau were to find she did everything.

Mehitable felt rather guilty at having urged her to go, but as far as that went, all the midnight feasters were feeling a little uneasy as the hour approached. Gladys came into their room soon after the lights were out. She was grateful to Mehitable for the invitation, but was very pessimistic about the whole affair. The girls had put on night gowns over their dresses, and at a quarter of twelve they replaced them with warm coats, for in spite of warm house dresses they knew that the night chill of the Castle would be very great. Just before twelve they went out, the three of them, into the hall. Una was waiting outside the door. They shut it softly and followed Una down the hall. She wore her red cloak and walked lightly, hardly seeming to touch the ground. By long experience she knew exactly the boards that squeaked and those that did not. The others tried to follow her, but they did not walk so deftly and now and then a board creaked ominously.

At the top of the stairs several silent listening figures awaited them, the Slowburn twins, each with a large package of sandwiches, Tip—or—yes, of course it was Tip, but what a sight! Tip in white flannels and with her face blackened! She had a bottle of olives and a package containing two boxes of

sardines under one arm, and whirled a cane with the other. Chiona, in a dark, heavy kimona, stood on the top stair. After a second or two, there was a whirring sound and the cuckoo jumped out of his hiding place in the clock above the stairs. At once the girls began to descend. Cuckoo announced in twelve long strokes that it was midnight. Quickly they met Clythie and Jean on the floor below and would have reached the end of the last flight under cover of the cuckoo's call, had not Gladys stubbed her toe and would have fallen if Tip had not caught her. Clythie glared at Tip, who, safe on the lower floor with all the world before her, started a noiseless song and dance, and Una said fiercely, "Don't be stupid, Tip." It took them all some time to cross the petite salle à manger, for a governess had the room just above and it was considered to be the most difficult place of all. The icy chill of the glass veranda made them shiver as they crossed it stealthily. Clythie turned the handle of the door at the far end, the one leading to the corridor under the Long Gallery, and waited until they had all come inside and then shut the heavy door herself, very softly. They found themselves facing the dark mistiness of the corridor. For an instant they all hesitated, even Una. Somehow it was so dark, so long and silent.

From the garden came the hoot of an owl. The moon was big, and a silver glimmer touched the duskiness here and there. It was Una who stepped first down the white marble steps leading to the corridor. She looked back at the others smiling.

"Come," she whispered. "Come, the pixies are fairly dancing in the moonlight in the garden. They are having a fairy revel and we must have ours. Come!"

Clythie beckoned to the others, caught Jean's hand and swiftly and silently the naughty band of revellers followed.

Now and then something white gleamed suddenly through the gloom, startling them. It proved to be a statue, or an easel, all familiar enough objects in the daytime, but rather eerie in the whispering night of this ancient building. Some leaves falling, swished against the windows. Tip began to cake-walk in a long stretch of moonlight. They reached the stairs leading to the Long Gallery and when they were all safely at the top of the long flight they felt more secure than at any time since leaving their rooms. If they kept moderately quiet now they were safe. They were very far from watchful governesses. Madame was safe in Vichy. That in itself was a great blessing, for there was not one of them, even reckless Tip, who was not in awe of Madame. Una had confided to Mehitable that she would rather have had the feast when Madame was at home.

"Somehow it would seem more decent," she had said, "not to take advantage of her absence, but of course it's safer, we have to think of that."

They made the last part of their way rather quickly. The moon gave them some light and they soon found themselves in the middle room. It was the room where Madame, the singing mistress, gave her lessons and in the daytime there was nothing about it at all unusual. But at night, with the moon making opal shadows on the walls and bringing out in strange relief the figures on the tapestry curtain in the corner, it was somehow indescribably alluring and ghost-like.

"I see spooks in every corner," remarked Tip, as she opened a sardine box.

"Hush, no nonsense of that kind, please, Tip. Someone will scream if you begin that sort of talk." Clythie glanced at poor Gladys as she spoke, rather witheringly, for Gladys was nervous and showed it.

A white pool of light in one corner invited their picnic and soon they were busy arranging things, and what fun it was! Jean had smiled on funny little Julie the nurse, and that combined with a tip had produced some late plums and some rosy little apples for the feast. The fruit was put in the center of the patch of moonlight which Tip called the tablecloth. Nancy's short-bread and the mocha cake were placed next to it. Then came a pot of jam and a large box of biscuits. The Slowburn twins' sandwiches, still in their white nakpin covering, were laid carefully down and the twins gave an almost simultaneous sigh of relief. They had found them a great burden and were glad to have them safe at their journey's end. The sandwiches had been in a hat box all the afternoon and were quite dry, but were voted delicious by the midnight feasters. A bottle of olives held sentinel's post at each end of the feast. They all sat about on the floor. Then Tip waved her hand and called out in so loud a voice that she was frowned upon by all present.

"Here begins the famous banquet in the Chateau's haunted room. In all its fifty years as a school—in fact in all the hundreds of years of its existence, never before have human beings dared to visit it at night—you notice that I say human beings, but—

"Oh, hush, Tip," put in Una, and they all laughed.

They were all in the spirit of the adventure. Even Gladys forgot to be cold and to worry about having neuralgia the next day, and joined in the feast with the best of them. Sardines spread on Felix Potin's biscuits and eaten in the dead of night are delicious, so they agreed. Three bottles of ginger beer produced from the pockets of Tip's coat were not enough for so many, but the two tin cups did good service and were passed around repeatedly. Tip remained silent in spite of many

questionings as to where she had procured them and no one ever knew. Una was in high spirits. She sat in a patch of moonlight, her face looked very white, and there was an elfishness about her. Chiona sat on one side of her and Mehitable on the other. Chiona was a little confused, but no one knew it. No one ever knew what Chiona really thought. She took an olive that someone passed her, rather gingerly and ate it slowly, listening to Una's tale of the mocha cake.

"Girls," said Una leaning forward and speaking mysteriously, "It really was an adventure, this afternoon, buying the cake. Just at the critical moment when all seemed lost, the unexpected happened. Out of nowhere a boy appeared. He must have been standing just back of me as I ordered the cake and must have seen Fräulein turn around, and also my look of despair, for quick as a flash, he took the box from the girl and the change as well and gave them to me on the way out in the crowd. He was such a nice boy, I wonder who he could have been," Mehitable was silent and none of the others knew. All agreed that it was an adventure and eyed the big cake with interest as Una produced a large, very rusty knife and started to cut it. She looked up just as she was about to cut the first slice and said, "Clythie must dance before we have the cake. You promised, you know," she added.

"Yes," assented Jean, "it will be enchanting here in the moonlight."

Clythie wore a long white cloak over the gray crepe frock that she had had on during the evening. The moonlight gave it an odd green color. Her hair was braided in two shining braids about her head. She went over to a far corner of the room and stood silent for some minutes. Then suddenly she began to dance. While Clythie danced Mehitable thought of

water lilies and deep wood shadows, of early bird twitters and first fragile spring flowers, nymphs playing in fairy fields, sunsets in far-off valleys. When she finished and sank smilingly down beside Jean, everyone clapped softly except Mehitable. Instead she looked wistfully at Clythie—how wonderful she was after all—how beautiful! Tip's applause was so loud that Clythie put out a quick protesting hand.

"Hush, remember where we are," she admonished.

"Well, where are we?" asked Una, pretending to be dazed. "I thought we were in fairyland."

"This floor doesn't feel much like fairyland," put in matter of fact Gladys. This was rather an unfortunate remark and brought them back to earth for a moment, until Una put her hand on Chiona's shoulder and said, "Sing us a little Japanese song."

"I ought to have my Koto to play on as I sing," protested Chiona, but she sang a pretty quaint air, a lullaby about a flower that fell in love with the moon. It was a song that had been sung to her when she was a baby far away in Japan.

"You may sing it with your Koto at the next concert, Chiona, but it will not be as thrilling as here in the middle of the night. Tell us," added Clythie, bending towards her in her queenly way, "tell us of your life in cherry land."

Chiona was silent for a moment, sitting with stiff grace in her purple satin kimona, then she said.

"I will tell you about the day I love best in my country—'Doll Day'."

"Doll Day!" exclaimed Tip.

"Yes, it is the children's day in Japan, but the grown people love it too. It also means a great deal to them. It is just like a feast day, it is a day of solemness."

Tip grinned at this and Clythie glanced at her warningly.

"Tell us, Chiona," she said gently, "we are all longing to hear."

"We have a long—what do you say—tier of shelves, and over that we put a red velvet covering, then the dolls are carefully arranged. First on the top shelf are the Emperor and Emperess, doll figures of them, beautifully made! Oh, you should see how very cleverly they are made. Then on the shelf below them are dolls of a little lower rank and so on down to the very most humble family in Japan. Then we put on our very finest clothing and we invite our friends. They come to call upon us and we bring out our loveliest tea service and we give them tea. Oh, it is a very, very happy day."

No one knew quite what to say when Chiona finished speaking. They had all been interested in her story, but the oddness of it was so surprising that words somehow failed them. To really be serious as Chiona was, about little doll figures, seemed unbelievable.

"We've had a story about cherry land, now let's have one about Cherryville," said Una, smiling at Mehitable, as she passed around ample slices of the cake. Mehitable hesitated. If only Clythie was not there. Why did she find it so difficult to speak before her?

Suddenly a thought of their last picnic came to her, the one when they had built the biggest fire of all. And sitting there amongst her new friends she told about the old ones, of the far away dear hollow in the wood, of the whispering ferns and the sweet hot pine air, of the charmed circle about their big fire of brush. She told about Robin and Johnnie, about dear Barbara and the Bently twins, until she suddenly grew so homesick that she was obliged to stop. It was because of Barbara. She never ceased to long for her to share this wonderful new life, and in speaking of her for the first time to

these new girls, she suddenly became doubly dear. She turned towards Una as she finished and before anyone could speak, she said herself, "Tell us about Ireland, Una."

Una patted her hand. "Some day I hope I'll meet them all and see the hollow," she whispered. Then as others clamored for a story, she smiled rather mysteriously and raised her eyebrows.

"A story," she exclaimed, "Why the only sort of story for to-night is a ghost story or a fairy story.

"Do you really believe in fairies, Una?" asked Jean.

Una nodded. The moon touched her pale little face with a wan light. "Oh, yes, the wee people dance about on wild spring nights, when the moon is hid. Who can deny it? Garth Hall, my home, is a strange place too, of a late hour at night, when the moon plays hide and seek as it does to-night," she added.

"What do you mean?" someone asked breathlessly.

Una yawned. "Oh, it's best not to tell creepy tales at this late hour, and in this place," she looked about at the listening upturned faces. "The timid ones would be scared entirely. They'd be sure to make a row," she added, "if I should tell all I know."

"Oh, tell us, Una, tell about Garth Hall at night," pleaded several voices.

"Oh, there's nothing very much to tell, only part of the place we don't use. Part of Garth Hall," she went on speaking slowly, "is haunted."

"Oh, how spooky you are, Una. Of course we don't believe in such nonsense," put in one of the Slowburn twins, "at least Bella and I don't. There are no ghosts anywhere around Columbus, Ohio."

"Is that so?" said a very Scotch voice, and they all turned

to look at Nancy who in her green plaid coat and with her sandy pigtails made anything but a romantic figure. "Maybe they've a good deal to learn in Columbus, but up around our way in Scotland, and around her way," nodding at Una, "we have fair many odd happenings."

She lapsed into silence after this and Mehitable regarded her with curiosity. "She's so matter of fact," thought Mehitable, "yet she's superstitious. Perhaps it's because she's Scotch."

"What have you ever seen, Una, or rather what do you think you've seen?" inquired Clythie.

"Oh, don't tell about it now," begged Gladys.

"We're all scarecats to be afraid of nothing. Ghosts—pooh," scoffed Tip. "Go on, Una," she added.

Una looked at her a moment rather dreamily. "I never saw her out but twice myself, the gray lady I mean, the very, very white lady in gray. Once it was early in the morning. I went on a message for cook, and went through the old part to save time. The sun was shining and I never thought of ghosts. The other time was at twilight. We were playing tennis and I lost my ball. It fell over the court of the old wing and I went over to find it. I saw her standing in the shadow—she—"

"What's that?" It was Clythie's voice, sharp and frightened. Someone screamed slightly and then for a moment there was only petrified silence.

The tapestry curtain on the opposite wall was moving, there was no doubt about it. An instant later something stepped into the room. What was it? No one dared to move or speak. It was a dim figure in the half light, but it moved swiftly into a patch of white and came steadily toward them.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORY OF ROSE MATHILDE

They saw a boy in gray tweeds smiling at them from the shadows. Yes, someone of real flesh and blood, someone who looked rather disappointedly toward the ravished feast, a hungry boy. "Hush, don't be frightened. I'm Phillippe de Villiers, Madame's grandson."

He came up to them and as the light shone full upon him, Una cried out, "Why it's the cake boy!"

This remark broke the ice and caused them all to laugh. The rescuer of the mocha cake was welcome indeed, even though he had frightened them so.

"The cake's all gone, what a pity," exclaimed Tip.

"Never mind," Phillippe said as he sat down in the place in the circle they had made for him. "If you'll just let me join in the fun for awhile, that's all I want. I guessed from something I heard you say in the cake shop, that the feast was to be up here," he added, turning to Una with a smile.

He saw Mehitable sitting in the shadow and there was a twinkle in his eye as he smiled at her. What a secret they had in common! What fun it all was! Mehitable wondered if ever before there had been anything as thrilling as this party in the Long Gallery. In a minute Phillippe was provided with biscuits and sardines and the remaining three olives and some plums.

"You see I've a secret way up here. You saw how I came, that is you saw me appear from behind the curtain. If I couldn't explore around here and find out funny secret places

I'd—well, I'd never be able to stand the loneliness. You were telling ghost tales when I came in. Do go on, we all want to hear some more."

Una shook her head. "No you tell a story," she demanded. "Couldn't you tell something about the Chateau?" suggested Mehitable.

"Yes do, it would be sure to be creepy," put in Tip.

Phillippe clasped his hands about his knees and looked smilingly from Una to Mehitable. "I'd rather hear more about the very white lady in gray," he said. "But—let me see. Yes, I do know something to tell about the Chateau."

He was silent for a moment and they all waited quietly for him to begin. He too sat in a patch of moonlight and his face as he began to speak grew suddenly grave, almost mysterious.

"My story isn't really a creepy one," he said, "it's just something that happened here, well, a good many years ago, something that happened to my great, great-aunt."

"Something real. Oh, do tell it," breathed Mehitable.

"Oh, yes, tell us please," exclaimed the others, for he seemed to hesitate.

"I'm very bad at telling tales. I make any story as stupid as can be, but this is interesting to me because it is about my own great, great-aunt. If grandmother ever changes about the old wing, I mean if she will ever let you all come over there, I'll show you the picture of Aunt Rose Mathilde."

Someone passed him the last olive and he ate it slowly while trying to think of the right words for his story.

"Our family—my father's family of course,—suffered badly in the Revolution of 1792, the very dreadful revolution when our king and queen were executed." He glanced at Mehitable as he spoke, being sure of her interest. "Several estates in the middle south were destroyed or taken over by the govern-

ment and a number, four I think, of the men in the family, cousins, were beheaded by the guillotine."

"Oh, I like this story," put in Tip. Phillippe smiled and went on. "My great-great-great-grandparents (Oh, I wish I didn't have to say that every time I speak of those long ago people! Suppose I just say 'my grandparents' and 'great aunt' and let it go at that. You know what I mean.)—were in England when the worst of the first trouble began and just as they were starting back for France, my grandmother became ill. My grandfather could not leave her alone. He had no idea at first of the great seriousness of the revolution and sent word by carrier to one of the cousins, asking him to come at once to England with Aunt Rose Mathilde, who was here in Paris at the Chateau with a companion. By the time the letter reached Paris the cousin was waiting his trial in prison. Rose Mathilde was still here at the Chateau, though most of the servants had left and her companion, who was in a terrible state of fear, was making ready to fly to the country. As the story goes, she begged and begged Rose Mathilde to go with her, but she would not, for she did not really believe there could be any great danger for her. She was in her own home where her ancestors had lived and she could not realize the danger. She kept expecting that her father and mother would come every day and knew nothing of course of her mother's illness, and her father's orders for her to come to England. She could not know this for of course the letter to the cousin never reached him nor any of the family."

Phillippe stopped speaking and looked around. "There isn't anything to drink is there?" he asked. "I'm so thirsty." There proved to be several swallows of ginger ale in one of the bottles. He drank it eagerly and then went on with his tale.

"The companion was rather a silly sort of woman, I should

think, for she had hysterics and carried on so much that Rose Mathilde insisted on her going to her sister's near Limoges, which was a fairly safe district just then. She said that she herself must wait here at the Chateau for her parents as she knew they would want her to do so. She had no fear of anything happening to her and so the companion did leave and Rose Mathilde stayed on for several weeks alone, except for the few servants that remained.

"She did not dare to go out alone on the streets, but sometimes a few friends would come to see her. It's difficult to explain somehow, but at this time it was only the beginning of the trouble, and people still went about a little, tried to be just as usual, and would not believe that anything could really happen to them. Several families, a good many in fact, were not troubled at all for some months and not really feeling themselves in danger, did not try to escape until it was too late."

Phillippe looked about apologetically. "I'm telling this in such a bungling way," he said.

"Oh, do go on," pleaded Jean. "I must know what happened to Rose Mathilde."

"First I must tell you about the heroine of the story."

"Isn't Rose Mathilde the heroine?" asked Clythie.

Phillippe shook his head. "No, she isn't the heroine," he answered. "Although Rose Mathilde sent several times for her modiste, she did not answer the summons. She was a funny little woman, but a very clever dressmaker and she was used to coming to the Chateau, in fact she was very fond of all the ladies in the family and had seemed to take great pleasure in making their frocks and dressing them for the great balls they so often attended. She was especially fond of Rose Mathilde and thought her the most beautiful girl in the world. She always delighted in making her charming

clothes and was never so happy as when she could stay and see the last of her before she would step into her carriage to be driven to some wonderful ball. All this had been before the revolution, but since the more serious state of things, Mademoiselle Toto had not appeared. Rose Mathilde felt this very much and felt even worse when she heard that the little dressmaker was on the side of the revolutionists. When she found that she was almost alone, she missed the kind woman who had seemed to admire her in the old days. She wished that she could ask her advice and was sadly grieved to feel that even funny little Mademoiselle Toto had deserted her.

"Rose Mathilde had a lover, but he wasn't of very much use to her because he was away fighting with the royalists. With her uncle and four cousins imprisoned, it seemed as though there was no one to whom she could turn. She stayed all day in her garden here. The old cook had some stores of provisions and would go out at night for milk and meat when she could get it. So the days went by and still no word came to Rose Mathilde from the world outside. She grew at last very tired, and one day when old Selene the cook came to her in the garden and told her that she had a visitor and that the visitor was Mademoiselle Toto, she was so relieved that she nearly embraced her when she went into the salon and found her there.

"But she saw at once that the little dressmaker was in terrible distress. At first it seemed as though she could not speak at all, but in a very few minutes, she was able to tell Rose Mathilde all that she had come to say. She told her that she was in great danger of her life, and must fly at once. She grew very impatient when Rose Mathilde would not believe her and finally made her see the situation just as it was. Mademoiselle Toto told her that from the beginning of the

worst of the trouble, she had been apparently interested in the revolutionists side, but that she had done it simply because she realized that it was the only way that she could be of any real help to the family that she loved and who had always done so much for her. She had been able to get many valuable bits of information, but only that day had she heard news of the greatest importance. The news was that Rose Mathilde herself was to be arrested within a few hours, that spies were in waiting for her parents, should they set foot in France, and that the Chateau itself was to be given over to the revolutionists.

"Rose Mathilde listened to this story as though she were in a dream. At last she realized her danger and turned to her one friend to help her, promising to do exactly as she told her, for only by doing so could she be saved. Mademoiselle Toto assured her."

"What did she look like?" asked Una.

"Who, Mademoiselle Toto? Well, there is no picture of her, but the story goes that she was very odd and sort of wizened looking. Some of our relatives have a letter written afterward that said she had on a funny buff-colored frock that day and a white bonnet that came way over her face. These she made Rose Mathilde put on at once, pinning her lovely golden hair as far back as she could so that it would not show beneath her bonnet, she showed her how she must stoop over and tried to impress upon her the fact that she must, absolutely must, stoop all the time and must keep her face as far back inside the bonnet as she could. Rose Mathilde practised trying to walk like Mademoiselle Toto and made herself as small and bent over as she could, for the plan of the little dressmaker was this:

"Rose Mathilde was to go out of the Chateau disguised as

Mademoiselle Toto. She was to go at once to an address that the dressmaker gave her, and there would find a friend who would take her out of the gates. There was a passport ready for her and the friend whose name she gave, would see her safe in a chaise bound for Calais, before he left her. She then must trust in God, for that was all they could do for her. There had been no time to get any word to Calais, but there was an anti-revolutionist there, a Paul Deleau, who would shelter her if he could. Poor Mademoiselle Toto tried to impress on Rose Mathilde how very careful she must be. The friend in Paris would give her another disguise, but even so her path would be beset with the greatest dangers. Rose Mathilde promised to do all that Mademoiselle Toto told her and then asked what the dressmaker herself would do. 'Do not be afraid for me, I can quite well take care of myself,' so the letter says was the answer. She was very angry with Rose Mathilde for hesitating at the idea of leaving here there and said she could quite well make up a disguise for herself if only Rose Mathilde would go. She hurried her to the front entrance and watched her go down the garden path. At the door in the wall Rose Mathilde turned and waved her hand and then opened it and went out."

There was breathless interest from the little group around Phillippe, as he paused a minute. "Go on as soon as you can," entreated Tip, who was following every word. It was the sort of story that she liked best of all.

"I don't like to tell the rest, but I suppose I must," said Phillippe, and he went on with the tale before anyone could speak again. "Rose Mathilde stepped outside and found herself alone on the street for the first time in her life. She crossed the road and went down a side street on her left, as Mademoiselle Toto had told her to do. Her heart almost

stopped beating, for as she hurried on, a group of soldiers came along on the other side of the street. They were shouting and singing as they came, and when they saw her they waved their arms and shouted all the louder. She was terrified but realized after a moment that they took her for the dressmaker, for one of them who was in officer's uniform called out, 'That is old Toto.' They passed on in the direction of the Chateau and Rose Mathilde stood looking after them, being almost too frightened to move. Suddenly she thought of Mademoiselle Toto. What if these soldiers were making straight for the Chateau? Oh, her rescuer had not expected them so soon. Would she be able to get away before these men arrived? She half started back but realized there was nothing she could do and so hurried on to the faraway part of the city where she was to find the man who was to take her out of Paris."

Phillippe stopped speaking and someone said, "Is that all?"

"No, of course not. Rose Mathilde had all sorts of adventures, but she did finally reach England in safety and found her father and mother. There are chronicles of her adventures on the way, some other time if you like, perhaps I can tell you."

"There is more. Oh do tell what happened to Mademoiselle Toto," said Mehitable.

"She was the heroine, you know," answered Phillippe slowly. "And in those days a great many people died for their friends."

"You mean that she was killed?" asked Clythie.

Phillippe nodded. "I'm sorry to have told such a sad sort of tale, but you wanted something that really happened. There's no use in making up a happy ending, for it wouldn't be true."

"Oh, no," said Una softly. "If they could go through with it all, we can bear to hear it," she added.

Phillippe gave her an approving smile. "That's what I feel," he agreed. "Mademoiselle Toto, as I said, had not expected the soldiers so soon. She was very quick-witted, which Rose Mathilde was not, and if she had not been so taken by surprise, it's possible she might have gotten away in some of the cook's clothes, but while she was making up a disguise, they found her, and when they realized what she had done, they arrested her and took her to prison. They were furious that Rose Mathilde had escaped and there was no chance for the dressmaker. She confessed that she had aided her escape and she herself died on the guillotine. Oh, she was splendid. She will never know what a help she's been to me. I'm far prouder of her than of many of my own ancestors—good little Mademoiselle Toto," he added. "She was worth ten of Rose Mathilde."

Several of the girls were wiping their eyes and Gladys said, "What a sad story."

Phillippe shook his head smiling. "Not really sad," he answered.

"It's a glorious story," said Tip, her eyes shining. Somewhere in the distance a clock struck one. They thanked Phillippe, and he thanked them for a jolly half hour, and then quietly without mishap the revellers crept back to their rooms.

CHAPTER XIV

"LE JOUR DES MORTS"

October flew by so quickly that it seemed incredible to Mehitable when she woke one morning and found she had been a month at the Chateau. It had been a month of blue and gold days, of walks under scarlet trees in the Bois, of studying in the salle d'étude with the sun streaming in through the long French windows. A month of new impressions, new thoughts and emotions; two wonderful afternoons in Paris, one with Nancy and Gladys and once alone with Una and jolly Madame Bourget. That had been a red letter day, sun and beauty on the great wide rue de Rivoli; they had walked almost the whole length of it, Madame Bourget in the middle, holding them firmly one on each side. The great black mass of humanity surged along with them, jewels and flowers and finery had sparkled from the windows.

A long hour in the Musée Carnavali, gazing at things that Napoleon had used and loved! Then away from the dusk of the museum, breathing of old-time treasures, away for a sail down the Seine on a gay little white steamer, tea at Sainte Cloud on the terrace! Back again toward the gray and gold city, with autumn wind blowing in their faces and the smiling interest of an old curé and a whole family of pleasure seekers, papa, mamma, and five dark-haired children surrounding them! It had been a joyful day and she had written of it in a long letter to Barbara.

Through October, Mehitable had played a great deal and worked only enough to make a fair showing in "le classe

particulaire." She had not really meant to neglect things, and a letter from Aunt Comfort on a gray morning early in November, made her realize that it was time she began to work in earnest. The letter was a kind, almost chatty one. Aunt Comfort had spoken of Barbara. "She comes over to see us several times during the day and we read your letters over and wish for you. We know that you have begun to work toward your future and are willing to bear the loneliness, knowing what the separation will mean to you." This from Aunt Comfort! Mehitable could hardly believe it because it did not sound like her at all. "We are willing to bear the loneliness because we know what the separation will mean to you." How good they were, how she loved them! She was thinking of them as she made ready for the promenade. She liked to imagine showing Paris to Barbara, for the first time, wondered what Johnnie and Robin would think of this and that. After all, they were the vital things in her life, these old friends, no matter how interesting the new ones might seem.

Mehitable was very happy in her friendship with Una. It meant much to her of charm and of romance, and it was to mean very much in her later life. But Una was an older student, with many demands on her time. She was in a high class, next to the head, under a very strict teacher. She and Clythie and Jean naturally had many past good times and experiences in common. Mehitable felt this, and at times was very lonely. Homesickness talked to her this dark gloomy day. It had rained for nearly a week, and though at last the rain had ceased, there was still a gray sky and a sense of brooding in the air. They were all to go for the promenade, so Mehitable met Una on the veranda and they joined a group of girls with Mademoiselle Gélere, and started out for their walk. The leaves had fallen rapidly and the trees looked gaunt and bare.

"The trees are lonely for the leaves," Mehitable said to Una, as they walked off toward the upper part of Neuilly, and away from the city.

"You say such gloomy things to-day, Mehitable," answered Una.

She was a little cross, for she had been trying to work and at the same time enjoy herself. Fun was the spice of life to Una. No one had discovered the midnight feast, and this had given them great confidence. They had not again attempted anything as daring as another feast in the Long Gallery, but they had had many an impromptu good time; meeting for short gay talks on the stairs, after dinner, with Tip standing guard at the top. Singing together in the practise-rooms English songs, everything from the "Quaker Girl" to Tosti's "Goodbye." All this was very much against the rules, for no English was allowed at the Chateau.

"The trees are lonely without the leaves"—Mademoiselle Gélere had understood this. "You must not speak English, Mademoiselle," she admonished. "You are right, this is a lonely day," she added. Mehitable looked at her inquiringly. "It is le jour des morts," she went on, "the day of the dead. It is the day when all in France go to the graves of those they love." She spoke English because she knew that as yet Mehitable could not quite understand.

As they turned a corner they came upon a number of people dressed in black, carrying flowers, white and pink asters and pale roses. Their faces were sad and they seemed a part somehow of the gray day, with its listless, falling leaves and still, brooding air. A little farther on they met a long row of school children, all in black and all carrying wreaths of flowers or green leaves, and on their way home they had to wait at a corner for some time as a procession of carriages and motors

went by, filled with heaped-up piles of flowers, glowing roses, lilies, golden chrysanthemums, wreaths, crosses, white and rose and violet. Flowers for the many loved graves of the Paris dead.

As they stood on the corner waiting, two flower girls offered them bouquets, simple ones, rosebuds and asters tied together with bits of grass. Una and Mehitable begged Mademoiselle to let them buy some, just a few pence for the fragrant posies, but Mademoiselle shook her head. It was against Madame's orders for them to buy anything on the promenade and she could not therefore consent. She was thinking of her own sister in a faraway grave in the south of France, and she wiped her eyes as they turned into the open green door of the Chateau gate.

Madame had returned from Vichy the night before. It was her habit since she had more or less given over the directing of the school to the Head Mistress, to spend the month of October in Vichy for her rheumatism. In fact, she was obliged to go there at intervals during the winter. Her influence, however, was present always at the Chateau; there was no one who did not stand in awe of her very name. To Mehitable, who had only seen her for a moment that first evening, she was a fascinating and awe-inspiring person.

At recreation on the "jour des morts," Mehitable wandered down the long corridor to the door leading to the old part; she had been there on two other Thursdays, but the door had always been locked and she was beginning to despair of seeing Phillippe again. No one had seen him since the night of the feast in the Long Gallery, but they had talked it all over many times in great excitement, surmising as to why he never came to the school. His timely arrival the night of the feast had been the crowning touch to a most thrilling event.

Mehitable had never told of her adventure in going to the old part. It was fun to have the secret just between herself and Phillippe.

To her delight the door opened easily and she went inside and shut it as she had done that Thursday, four weeks before. Again the long, gloomy rooms stretched before her, and because of the darkness outside, they seemed somehow bleak and forbidding. She ran across them quickly, toward the stairway leading to Phillippe's rooms, but as she neared the door of the last room she stopped and stood motionless. Someone was coming toward her down the stairs.

Mehitable's heart beat quickly. She stood with her hands at her sides. She looked a very little figure as she stood there with the gloom of the great room behind her; a figure in a badly made brown dress, with rather untidy locks of hair falling about her forehead. Madame saw all this, for it was Madame! She came up to Mehitable and stood looking at her in astonishment. The sharp eagle-like eyes resembling Phillippe's in spite of the sternness of their gaze, looked straight into Mehitable's gray ones. She recognized her as the little new girl who had come with Fräulein.

For a moment there was silence, and then she said: "What is the meaning of this? Why are you here Mademoiselle? Do you not know that you are breaking a school law?" Her voice was cold and sharp.

Mehitable had never heard any voice like it before; it seemed somehow to deprive her of speech. She clasped her hands together and looked up bravely at Madame. "I came to see Phillippe," she said simply.

"You came to see Phillippe!" Madame repeated, "Explain yourself," she added.

Now it was indeed hard for Mehitable. She had spoken

honestly and impulsively, and Madame naturally expected an explanation. Could she ever make her understand that she had not really meant to be so naughty?

"It was just after I came—one day I found the door open and—and I came in—I knew it wasn't allowed but I was homesick and oh, I so wanted to see the old part of the castle, I'd dreamed and dreamed about, it and then I found Phillippe."

"You went to my grandson's apartments?"

"I went up the stairs and he saw me and asked me to come in. We talked for quite a while and had such a good time," she added. She looked up at Madame again, as she spoke. There was some fear in her eyes, but there was honesty and wistfulness too. Mehitable was frightened but she felt that Madame would understand. She would have been very much more uneasy had she had any idea of the sharpness of Madame's temper, but she was soon to find this out, for as Madame looked at her, Mehitable saw that she was very angry. How could she make her understand. She had been disobedient but somehow she had never meant to be as naughty as Madame's eyes seemed to make her out. She would never understand how she had dreamed of old places all her life, how the old wing of the castle had seemed to call her.

Madame's voice broke in on her quick startled thought. Mehitable was right, she could not know her dreams and fancies; she saw her only as a very naughty little girl, and as such she judged her. To be sure she had been quite honest. Madame had admitted that, for she tried to be just. She said at once that she knew she had broken the rules; being a new girl she might have saved herself somewhat by pretending ignorance of the fact that one must keep absolutely away from the old wing. Well, she would not break this rule in

the future. Madame would make sure of that. Perhaps the grayness of the day outside or some very deep trouble of her own made Madame unmoved by the appeal in Mehitable's eyes.

"You have begun your first term at the Chateau by extreme disobedience. Your name was on the list of those wishing to go to the opera to-morrow night?"

"Yes, Madame," answered Mehitable faintly.

"To punish you then I shall not allow you to go to-morrow night or any time during this month, nor can you go to Paris on a half holiday afternoon through November, and of course, you are never to come to this part of the Chateau again. She waved toward the door through which Mehitable had come, far back at the end of the silent old ballroom. "Go back to the school," she added sternly, then gathering together some papers she had in her hands she herself turned and walked quickly down a long corridor at the side of the stairway.

Mehitable stood silently for a moment, and then turned and walked slowly back, opened the forbidden door and stepped into the hall below the Long Gallery. The garden outside seemed full of girls, for it was recreation hour, and the day was mild though so dark and still. As she stood there for a moment, Mehitable thought of the afternoon when she had first gone to the old wing, how she had watched Clythie and Jean walking in the garden and how she wished they had asked her to join them. They almost never asked her to do anything. Being Una's friends, they were always gracious to her and when they all did things together she was with them, but these two girls had somehow never taken her in, they had never tried to know her. Once Jean had asked her to come for a walk in the garden some day, but she had not repeated the invitation and Mehitable had been too shy to

remind her. She turned now and walked slowly upstairs to the Long Gallery and on, into one of the far practise-rooms; it was the last one and there was no piano, only an old table and chair. It was never used as a schoolroom.

Mehitable went over to the window and stood there looking out. The voices of the girls in the garden came to her faintly; she stood with her hands folded on the sill and saw the garden through a blurr of tears. For weeks she had looked forward to this night at the opera. Mrs. Lindsay had wished her to go now and then, so she had been able to put her name down with Una's and some of the others. Even Nancy was going, and Gladys, who always wanted to do as Mehitable did, was going too—she would have to stay at home alone. Mehitable knew that in spite of this disappointment, it was not the real reason for her unhappiness. Discontent had been talking to her all day, self-pity and all sorts of black things. "It's the day," she whispered to herself, "it's the gray, gray, day," but she knew that it was not really so. She felt little resentment toward Madame, though just at first she had been angry. She realized that she had quite knowingly broken the rules, and that in a way her punishment was deserved. Madame could not understand it all, could not quite know how she was feeling.

She would not see Phillippe again, that was the hardest of all. They had become friends in that one encounter and she had so looked forward to knowing him better, to hearing more about the castle, its old secrets, real ones that Phillippe knew, his life in England and oh, so many things. He had wanted to know about Cherryville, had been really interested. There were so many things she could have told him, and he was so lonely, surely it was not right for him to be so by himself. Why, oh why, did Madame guard him so closely?

"There is some trouble, some great sadness," thought Mehitable. She had seen sorrow in Madame's eyes, and in spite of her own hurt a real feeling of pity welled up in her heart. "She's sad, that is one reason why I couldn't make her understand," she thought.

Mehitable's thoughts were interrupted suddenly by voices in the next room. Someone began to play a bar or two of music. It was the little waltz air that Jean played for Clythie when she danced. It changed suddenly to "Couleur de rose" from the "Quaker Girl"—then the music stopped, and Mehitable heard Clythie's voice.

"Do you really think Madame will want me to dance at the concert Saturday night, Jean? One never knows what she will like."

"Oh, yes, do Clythie," Jean's voice answered. "The governesses all want you to, they have never seen you dance. What will you wear?"

"The gray, I think, and the thin rose scarf, it's so shiny and soft. You'll wear your new blue. Oh, you're sweet in that, Jeanie."

"It is rather nice," answered Jean. "Oh, I do wish we had some sort of fluffiness for that poor child, Mehitable."

Clythie's voice broke in. "Jean, she dresses like a—why some very poor sort of farmer girl, or not like that either, for farmer girls generally manage to have something presentable. Those brown dresses of her's and that awful red and white check silk she puts on for the concerts! She's so plain anyway. Of course, she can't help that, but really, you know, she doesn't look like a Chateau girl at all."

"She has such nice eyes, lovely ones. She's rather a dear I imagine, if one really knew her, but her clothes are hopeless."

Would they ever stop? Mehitable held on tightly to the window ledge and looked out at the dark ivy-covered wall of the garden, at the brooding sky and the piles of wet leaves. She did not move or stir. A bell rang in the distance, and she heard a quick movement in the next room as the girls hastily put their music together and went out. She heard them running down the stairs and saw everyone going toward the dining room, for recreation was over and the tea bell had sounded. She stood there until tea was over and the bell for classes had rung. She had no class that hour. Then she went slowly down the stairs, and taking her brown coat off a hook by the door where they kept their garden wraps, she went out into the quiet twilight.

It had grown colder, and she shivered slightly as she walked through the little dark pine path that led to the front of the house. She went directly to a tree that stood near a clump of birches. It was a chestnut tree and it had a hollow seat. The seat was quite low and the branches almost hid one from view even without their leaves. Mehitable had found the tree some days before and several times had come to it during recreation; she had to climb a little way to reach the seat, but that was nothing to a girl brought up in Cherryville. She could see the lights of Paris in the distance, rose and gold and white. She had written a little poem about them and had meant to show it to Una; now she felt as though she did not care if she never wrote again. She curled up somehow in the old tree, and there in the silence of the garden, with only the faint twitter of sleepy birds to break the heaviness of her grief, she sobbed her heart out. The birds did help her; one courageous sparrow came and looked at her from a nearby branch. He seemed to say, "See here, you funny human, aren't you ashamed to cry that way and to think yourself

such an abused girl! Don't you know that you have all sorts of lovely things to be grateful for? Hasn't your dream come true? Haven't you come to France where you can see and learn all kinds of wonderful things? Shouldn't you be rejoicing every minute over this? Doesn't Una love you? Wouldn't you rather have her for a friend than any of the others, and hasn't she said you are to go and see her in Ireland some day? Isn't that one of your dreams come true? Oh, Mehitable, forget yourself and your petty troubles. No one who is worth while, really minds your clothes. Take care of your thoughts and your actions and your clothes will take care of themselves. How do you know what's in store for you? Don't let two girls' idle chatter make you miserable. Forget it and smile. Cheer up, some homesick girl that may be more downhearted than yourself. Why, I'm ashamed of you, Mehitable Webster. What would the Cherryville friends think of you now? You've come here to work hard—aren't you forgetting that?"

Had he really spoken? Of course not! How absurd. Mehitable smiled through her tears and gazed at the funny little sparrow who watched her so inquisitively. "I'll just pretend he did speak, and I'll stop crying this very second," she thought.

It was not so easy, however, for the hurt had seemed a very real one and had cut deep, but somehow she felt better, and sat up in the hollow, gathering the coat close about her shoulders. Jut then the gate bell clanged loudly, and she soon heard José's shuffling footsteps. It had grown so dark that he carried a lantern and fumbled at the door. It opened at last and someone stepped inside. In the waning light, Mehitable saw a lady. She stood for a moment, speaking to José, who went hastily back toward the Chateau, calling in his high cracked voice for Jacques the under-gardener to come

and help with some luggage. A dark looking woman, evidently the lady's maid, put a bag inside the garden door and went back for more. Mehitable could hear the chug of a motor standing outside. Suddenly the newcomer turned and saw her, half hidden as she was, by the branches. She looked so a part of the tree in her brown cloak that the lady laughed.

"Why, child, how you startled me! Are you a tree nymph or a real little girl?" She smiled at Mehitable as she spoke, coming close to her. "Her smile," thought Mehitable, is the most motherly smile in the world." She smiled back at the lady though her face was tear-stained, and she knew that she must look very forlorn.

The lady saw the tears and leaned farther toward her. "What is it, my child, why are you here alone? It is so cold and dark."

Mehitable found herself answering quite easily. "I—I was so sad, so unhappy—I had to come somewhere alone, away from them all—I've been here before, I can see the lights of Paris from here. To-day a little bird came and talked to me and comforted me so much—of course, he didn't really talk, I just like to pretend he did."

The lady nodded as though she understood. She stood up and drew a dark fur cape more closely about her shoulders. She was tall and had a beautiful pale face. Her eyes were gray and the hair under her wide, dark hat was very fair. She was like something, someone, who was it? Just then the maid came in with another bag, and the two servants came up the path. The lady leaned over and put her hand on Mehitable's shoulder.

"Dear child, be happy. Oh, be happy! I am so full of joy myself to-night that I cannot bear to see you miserable. It is only *au revoir*. I shall see you again."

She was gone toward the Chateau, her maid and the man following with her luggage. Mehitable waited a few moments, and in spite of the cold and loneliness of her nest, in spite of the ache at her heart which somehow was not quite so hard to bear, she felt an odd feeling of happiness. The joy and the understanding and the sweetness in the eyes of the lady had taken away her bitterness. She climbed down from the tree and walked the length of the garden, entering the house by the garden door. No one saw her. She closed the door against the darkness outside.

CHAPTER XV

"THE PLAY'S THE THING"

Sunshine made the old garden a picture of black and gold the next few days. Even the damp trodden leaves had a burnished look and the asters woke up from their dejected slumber, for they are hardy little flowers. All the week the Chateau girls spent their recreation hour in the garden and their glad voices rang back and forth through the autumn air. A group of them had gathered, one day, in a little summer house at a far corner of the garden. Clythie, who was always the undisputed head in any important matter of discussion, her faithful Jean, and Una O'Hara.

The three were deep in consultation. Madame had announced that there was to be a holiday very soon for them all, and that she would like very much to have some of them act a play on the night of the holiday. She knew that they had wished to do this as they had already asked her permission, and she expected them to be ready with the play in a week's time. She would set the holiday on Wednesday of the next week. Only five days remained, and Una and Clythie had not been able to find anything that they really liked. The play must be simple of course and short, because there was so little time and they had only the evenings to rehearse. Una had pored over the very limited library at the Chateau, and had found no play that she liked, or any story that could be turned into one.

"What shall we do?" asked Clythie despairingly, putting on her pretty blue silk Jersey as she spoke. "We must find

something and right off, too. Oh, if only Madame would let me go into the city, I know I could find something at Brentano's." The play was to be in English, a great treat on Madame's part. In fact they were to be allowed to speak English all day. Madame was very happy about something, there was no doubt of that. There was a softened look in her eyes as she smiled at the girls.

Suddenly Una spoke, "I'll ask Mehitable, somehow I'm sure she can help us. She has so much imagination and she has acted in little plays in Cherryville. Why—she's written them," she added, standing up and speaking eagerly. "I think she wrote one for Barbara and Robin and Johnnie. I'll go and find her."

Like a flash she was off, running through the garden and calling for Mehitable as she ran. She found her at last, curled up in the tree, for Una alone shared the secret of Mehitable's tree. She managed somehow to squeeze herself in by Mehitable and put her arm around her.

"Mehitable Webster," she said, "where have you been? I don't mean now, but yesterday and the day before? Do you really prefer that nice but stupid Gladys to me? You and she and Nancy seem always together. Oh, I've wanted so to talk to you but either you are hiding off by yourself somewhere or you're with them."

Mehitable smiled and put her arm around Una's neck, steadying herself against the tree. "Oh, Una, I love to hear you say that you wanted me. We are real friends, aren't we?" she asked wistfully. Una looked at her in astonishment. "Why of course we are, Mehitable, what do you mean?"

A week had gone by since that strange day, "le jour des morts," and Mehitable had tried very hard to forget the words she had heard in the Long Gallery. She had not seen the

lady again except in the distance, since that night, but they all knew that she was Phillippe's mother, Madame's daughter-in-law, that she and Phillippe were to spend part of the winter at the Chateau, and that something had brought happiness to Madame. Mehitable had only seen her for that moment in the garden, but she had not forgotten her words and she felt somehow that the mother of Phillippe had not forgotten her. It gave her a glad little feeling at her heart. She felt less lonely than at any time since she had come to the Chateau. She could not have explained why, even to herself. That one hard day had somehow helped her to see things differently. She had wakened to the fact that she must spend less time in seeking new adventures; that she would be far happier to be seriously at work. The last few days she had worked at her French verbs with real energy and had even translated a half page of a simple little story they were trying to read. Mademoiselle Gélere had been pleased with her.

She was glad that Una had come to her. How grateful she was that they were friends; she could not be grateful enough if Una loved her, it did not so much matter about the others. She had not told Una about having seen young Madame in the garden, the evening of her arrival, but now she turned to her and said, "Oh, Una, I saw Phillippe's mother first of all. I was here when she came," nodding toward the gate. "She came in there. I could hear a motor outside and then old José came and opened the door and while he went to find Jacques, she, young Madame, stood there by the path, so near me. She looked, oh, so beautiful, so different from anyone I'd ever seen. All of a sudden she saw me up here in the tree. She was startled a little I think, and she came quite close; she asked me if I were a tree nymph or a real little girl. Oh, she was so lovely, so kind to me."

"Mehitable, you are always having adventures, it isn't fair," protested Una.

Mehitable smiled, "This was the nicest adventure of the day, it was one I needed very much for I was sort of blue."

"Why, whatever was the matter of you, asthore?" asked Una. Mehitable did not answer Una's question, and Una was so full of the subject of the play that she did not wait for her to do so. "Oh, Mehitable, do think of a play for us. You know we can have one on the holiday next week, and we simply can't find anything. Madame let me look through the silly English library here at school, and there's nothing at all. Oh, *do,* dear Mehitable, think of something, some play you acted in Cherryville."

She put her arm impulsively on her friend's shoulder as she spoke, thereby nearly upsetting them both. Mehitable's eyes were shining as Una finished speaking. "Oh, Una," she said, "that's just what I have been doing. But I only did it for myself, I never dreamed you'd want it here. It was before Madame spoke of the play; it was because I—I was sort of lonely, you were busy and all—and so I wrote a play for you, about you."

"About me, Mehitable Webster, what do you mean?"

"It's not really about you, but you are the heroine. It's an Irish play, and it's very foolish I suppose. I mean of course, Una, I don't really know anything about writing plays, I've only read a few, this is just a little short one. I don't believe it would no. Oh, no," she added, "no, it never would do, not to be acted before Madame. Why it's just a childish little thing and very clumsy too. Only when you spoke of"—Una interrupted her.

"Mehitable, stop this minute, don't say another word. Get

down out of this tree and come with me. We'll find your manuscript—Oh, how important that sounds, doesn't it? Oh, Mehitable, I knew you'd save the day."

They scrambled down from the tree and ran across the grass and in at the garden door. Mehitable was very much excited, but still protested that it would not do. Una held her firmly by the arm and together they entered the schoolroom and found the roll of paper in Mehitable's desk. Together they read it. When she had finished Una was silent for a moment and Mehitable regarded her anxiously, fearing that she did not like it. Then Una spoke.

"It's lovely," she said. "Why, it *is* Irish, Mehitable, how could you do it?" She added slowly, "But you see, I couldn't be Lost Noreen, it wouldn't do."

"Why wouldn't it do?" demanded Mehitable, turning and looking at Una as she spoke.

Una colored slightly. "Well, you see Clythie must have the big part, she must be Lost Noreen."

"She shall not, oh, she shall not. I wrote that part for you, Una, you shall not have the play unless you are Lost Noreen." Mehitable spoke excitedly, and was indeed quite angry.

Just then a slight movement caused them both to look up. Nancy Græme, Mehitable's roommate, was watching them. There was the usual quizzical look in her eyes.

"Well," she remarked, "you both seem put about."

Mehitable was glad to see her, somehow there was something very dependable about brusque, outspoken Nancy. Mehitable turned and looked at Una. "May we tell her?" she asked. Una nodded.

"You see Nancy, I've written a little play. I've been doing it at odd times since I've been here at school, since I met Una.

It's an Irish play, and she must take the chief part. She must be Lost Noreen, and well, she says she can't be, she says that Clythie must be the heroine."

"And why, pray?" asked Nancy crisply. Una looked disconcerted.

"She always does," she said, "she expects to, and she's so good at plays," she added hastily, "she's acted at home."

"And you yourself, one of a large family, you've done your share of play acting in home theatricals, I'd dare swear," put in Nancy.

Una looked annoyed. How uncanny Nancy was! So direct and to the point. "Well, what if I have?" she demanded rather crossly. "Clythie must be Lost Noreen."

Mehitable's fighting spirit was up. "She shall not be Lost Noreen," she said.

Nancy meanwhile, with Mehitable's permission, was reading the little play. She looked up when she had finished and spoke severely. "You act like babies, both of you," she exclaimed. "Now this play is exactly the thing to have next week on the holiday night. It's not so bad, quite fairish," she added in her unenthusiastic way. "It must be used," she went on firmly, "one or the other of you must give in, it's childish to act this way. Now, I really think Mehitable is right. You're the one to take the Irish girl's part, aren't you? It's written for you, isn't it? What if Clythie does always have the best, seems to me it would be as good for her as Ellerman's Embrocation is said to be for rheumatism, if just once she didn't take the leading role. Why, it might make her really human. Who knows but she'd begin to realize that she isn't the Venus de Milo in a new incarnation!"

Una and Mehitable both gazed at Nancy as she finished

speaking. Mehitable wanted to laugh, but didn't, out of respect to Una who was very much put out and had drawn her light brows together in a frown. Nancy put the manuscript down and turned away. "Fight it out as best you can, but mark my words, Una must be Lost Noreen and Queen Clythie must take a back seat."

She walked off and down the room, out of the window into the garden. Janet McPherson, another Scotch girl, was waiting for her and they went arm in arm down the garden path. Nancy was silent for a few moments and then she remarked to her companion, "I don't believe in thinking big things about anyone, nor do I believe in fancy notions, but to my mind Mehitable Webster is going to make us a bit proud to have known her one of these days."

This from Nancy! If Mehitable could have heard it! In the meantime she and Una sat in the schoolroom, gloomily silent. Suddenly Mehitable's face brightened and she turned toward Una. "I'm sorry if I seemed cross Una, you know you are my friend and I wrote the play for you. It is all about an Irish girl, and I really meant her to be Una O'Hara, even though in the play she is called Noreen. I should think Clythie would be glad to have you do it. She isn't selfish, is she?"

"She always has the leading part in our plays," answered Una, ignoring Mehitable's question.

"Well I've thought of something, Una," went on Mehitable eagerly. "You know how beautifully Clythie dances. Oh, it's so lovely to watch her, it is really a poem. Now wouldn't it be splendid for me to work in a dance for her in the play? I could, quite easily, and it would give her more of a part; she can be your favorite sister, the one that misses you the

most. Oh, it will be charming—the dance I mean. I'll work over the play to-night after dinner and show it to you before prayers. Oh, I do feel that it's going to be all right, and it will make me so very happy if they like my little play well enough to use it."

Una gave Mehitable a sudden hug and just then the bell rang for tea.

"You're a dear, Mehitable, and I've been a pig. Your play is simply 'doughty' as we say in Ireland, and oh, to think you want me to be Noreen! You'll have to give Clythie more of a part and it's a splendid idea about the dancing, that will please her. We'll, we'll not worry now until you've worked it over; come to tea. We'll let them know about it in the morning."

At tea the girls, Clythie, Jean, and Tip were eager to know if Una had had any help from Mehitable about a play, but they refused to tell them anything about it. They all sat together at a far table by a window leading out to the garden. Tip was very hungry and grumbled over the tea, saying if she had gone with her mother to Cairo, she would now be feasting on all sorts of dainties including Turkish Delight, which was a prime favorite with her.

"I don't think a play will be any fun," she objected. "A minstrel show would be ever so much jollier."

Clythie sat at the head of the table and poured the tea. She wore her pale blue Jersey and her cheeks were flushed pink by the crisp autumn air. She was a very splendid looking head of the school, and there was an air of authority about her as she passed the tea cups to the girls. Una's bright locks were scattered all about her face and there was a long rent in her blue jacket. That had happened when she climbed up in the tree to talk to Mehitable, but there was something

about her quite different from the other girls; what was it? Mehitable had so often noticed it.

"She is like a princess," thought Mehitable. "She does not know it but she is like some old time queen, or some long ago princess." Mehitable was some day to see a picture, an old painting in a dim room at Garth Hall of a long ago Una who had been a princess and who had the same charm of face, the same distinction as her little happy-go-lucky descendant.

Clythie saw the rent and shook her head reprovingly at Una. "When will you grow up, Una? You're such a tomboy! Why you are nearly sixteen, in three years or so you will be out."

"Out, yes, mavourneen! Out, yes, in the fine fresh air, thank all the blessed powers that be! Out on the moors round Garth Hall, out on the blessed, blessed moors with the wind whistling by and the ground 'soft beneath Cuchulain's feet'." She looked around, smiling at the others, holding a piece of bread and treacle in her brown hand. They all laughed at the way she had taken Clythie's remark.

"You may have all the balls and parties in Chicago that you wish, Clythie, I'll be free." She leaned toward Mehitable as she spoke. "Mehitable and I will be free, we'll ride and breathe in the woods and sea, and you can write, Mehitable," she added.

Mehitable smiled, but Clythie did not seem any too well pleased. She glanced at Mehitable, and Mehitable, remembering the conversation she had heard, felt the color rush to her cheeks. Oh, why should she care? Why, just when she was feeling so happy could Clythie make her suddenly miserable? She looked up at Una and smiled. "It sounds like a fairy story, being with you in Ireland, Una," she said.

"Let me come too," begged Tip. Una smiled at her. "Mehitable would like Ireland better than any of you, but you are all welcome."

"Then we'll all come, Una," cried Jean as the bell clanged from the veranda, and they pushed their chairs back.

Mehitable found that she could change her play a little, giving Clythie more of a part. In fact, "I like the eldest sister very much," she thought as she erased and read over again certain parts. It was a very simple little play. Mehitable was not even sure that it could be called a real play. As she had said to Una, she knew nothing about writing one. It was rough and without much of a plot, but it did have a sort of charm; she liked it better as she read it over. Somehow, without really intending to, she had created parts that so well suited the different girls, Una, Clythie, Tip, and even gentle Jean.

That night after lights were out, Una appeared. Neither Mehitable or Nancy were asleep for Mehitable had told Nancy something which had somewhat upset her.

"I've a role for you in the play, Nancy. You must be the old nurse. Oh, you'll be just the one. Really, it's strange the way the characters seem to fit in. Oh, I hope the girls will want the play, do you think they'll choose it, Nan?"

"They have some sense, haven't they? Yes, they'll want it. But you never mean in this world that you want me to do play acting?"

Nancy sat up in bed, her stiff pigtails standing out each side of her odd little face. Just then Una had come in. She wore the red cloak that had graced so many good times at the Chateau and had done duty in charades at home at Garth Hall, in Ireland. She shut the door softly, and came and sat on the edge of Mehitable's bed, clasping her hands about her

knees. "I so wanted to know how you feel about the play. Will it be all right?" she asked.

Mehitable told her that she was very well satisfied with it and would read it to her in the morning. Una laughed. "Morning,—why wait until morning?" She dived into her cloak pocket as she spoke and drew out her little electric light.

Mehitable handed her the manuscript from under her pillow and Una bent over it. It was difficult reading by the very uncertain light, but one grew accustomed to little inconveniences at the Chateau.

After a while Una laughed softly and danced slowly around the room. "Oh, it's going to be such fun, girls," she said.

"What do you think of Clythie's part now?" asked Mehitable, as Una sat down on the bed again, and Nancy hospitably threw over a box of Felix Potin's biscuits.

"It is a dear part," Una answered softly. "I think it's going to be all right, and Clythie will be happy."

"Even though she won't be the center of the stage," Nancy thought this, but she did not say it out loud.

"Don't you think that Nancy will be just the one for the old nurse?" asked Mehitable.

She smiled mischievously as she ate her "Paul et Virginie" biscuit. These were brown, rather spicy ones, almost like cookies, and were great favorites with the Chateau girls. These particular ones had been a present to Nancy from a very staid elderly lady, a friend of her aunt's from Glasgow, who was having a week's holiday in Paris, and was to take Nancy out the next day for tea.

"Why of course Nancy must be the nurse, and Tip the Brownie. Oh, it will be regularly splendid. I'm so glad you wrote it, Mehitable. How did you happen to do it?"

Mehitable was silent a moment and then she said, "It was when I was sort of homesick one day early in the month, and somehow it made me happy to write. I've only done a little at a time and I didn't think it was good or that any of you would care for it. Now, to think that there is really to be a Lost Noreen! To think that perhaps my little play is coming true!"

After lunch the next day Una called Clythie, Jean, and Tip together, and with Mehitable they went into one of the classrooms and shut the door. Mehitable's face was pink and her eyes very bright. "She almost looks pretty," thought Una fondly as they gathered around the big classroom table.

"Mehitable has written a play herself since she's been here at school; fancy that. It's a dear play. I feel sure you'll all love it, only—" Una paused a moment and looked a little embarrassed.

"It's called 'Lost Noreen'," went on Mehitable, as Una stopped a moment. "Noreen is Irish and so of course, Una must have that part. And then, Tip's to be the Brownie. Oh, it's so nice the way everyone's part seems to suit them, that is, the way Una and I think they should be. Una is going to read the play to you."

"I wanted Mehitable to, but she said she'd rather I did it because I'm Irish and it's an Irish play." Una shook the hair out of her eyes, leaned her elbows on the table and read aloud to her interested little audience the play of "Lost Noreen."

When she finished, Clythie spoke impulsively. "Why, what a dear play," she exclaimed. "Of course, you'll be Noreen, Una."

"And you'll be the oldest sister, the one who dances. Will you like that part?" asked Mehitable a little anxiously. There was a moment's silence.

"Why, yes," said Clythie, graciously.

Jean and Tip both spoke impulsively. "It's a dear play, Mehitable," they said almost together. "It's a dear play and you're a dear to have written it. It's so Irish, how did you ever do it?" asked Jean. "You've never been there and yet somehow it just seems Irish.

"It was partly the way Una read it," explained Mehitable. "She's helped me too with some of the words," picking up her manuscript as she spoke, she turned a page or two and read a few sentences out loud. "I wish nurse would fetch the tea: Una told me to say 'fetch.' And there are several little things I didn't know about. I'm so glad you like it," she said shyly, "and I'm, oh, so happy that you want to act it. Tip must be 'Brownie' of course. Doesn't it just suit her? And I thought that my roommate, Nancy, would be splendid as the nurse."

They all smiled and agreed with her and as Miss Derk opened the door, they stood up, Mehitable holding the precious manuscript. Miss Derk asked briefly and in her usual sarcastic way if they had not heard the lesson bell. Mehitable looked at her a little wistfully as they went out. She was so happy just then herself and she wished she could share some of her pleasure with the cold English teacher. Several times she had wanted to show some little thing she had written to Miss Derk, but she was too shy to do so without some encouragement. There was no English composition class at the Chateau so that she had no occasion to write anything for Miss Derk except small exercises about whatever writer they were studying at the time.

Jean stopped short just outside the classroom. "Why!" she exclaimed, "what part are *you* going to take?"

"Una and I talked that over," answered Mehitable, "and we decided it would be better for me not to act, but to help arrange things and direct a little. Perhaps I could do that

better than someone else, as I wrote the play. I'll love looking on and would really rather be stage manager than anything else."

Mehitable tried to write out the pluperfect tense of the verb *to love,* but her mind would run on other subjects. She kept thinking during the next two hours of the play, and fairly had to make herself write out the verb. Just as the recreation bell sounded, someone spoke her name.

"Mademoiselle Webster." Mehitable looked up quickly and saw funny little Julie, the nurse, standing before her. "I bring you a message, Mademoiselle, from Madame de Villiers."

Madame wanted her! Oh, what had she done? Julie almost smiled when she saw the look of consternation on Mehitable's face. "It is the young Madame that wishes to speak with you."

"The young Madame?" Oh, who could it be—why yes, the dear lady she had spoken with in the garden, whom she had hoped to see again!

It all seemed like a dream to Mehitable as she followed Julie out of the schoolroom, through the glass veranda to the garden door. Madame de Villiers was waiting for her there, and smilingly held out her hand as she came up to her. "Yes, you are the little tree girl are you not? Will you walk with me in the garden for a few minutes? I've not been there at all since I came, and I know how fond you are of it."

Mehitable took her coat from the hook near the door and they stepped out into the pale, fast vanishing sunlight. Could it be true? She, Mehitable was walking in the garden with Phillippe's mother. She felt suddenly very shy, but she was so happy that she forgot it after a few moments and they were soon talking away like old friends.

She was so easy to talk to, this mother of Phillippe's, so understanding. She seemed to know somehow how one felt

without one's saying very much. She was quite tall and had to bend her head as Mehitable talked to her. She wore the dark fur about her shoulders, her hair was very pale gold and her face was very white. She had a strange look about her face and in her gray eyes, a look of one who had suffered deeply and at last found happiness, a look of radiant joy, very still and deep and quiet. She had not forgotten Mehitable. She had remembered the little forlorn figure she had found in the tree. The thought warmed Mehitable's heart. This was another beautiful thing to be thankful for.

Madame de Villiers spoke of Phillippe. "He feels that you are his real friend, and he wants to see you. Things are different now. You will all know Phillippe, I hope. The dark days for us are over," she smiled, and there was something a little sad about her smile. "You are too young to know about sorrow, Little Tree Girl, but some day, if he likes, Phillippe can tell you what he knows of the trouble that came to his father and how the sunshine has come back to him and to us all now."

She turned as she finished speaking and put her hand on Mehitable's shoulder as they walked down a far garden path. "I asked you to walk with me because I wanted to know if you are happy now and if I can help you." She took Mehitable's hand and they walked along hand in hand.

Mehitable suddenly found herself telling all about that sad, gray day, "le jour des morts." How unreal it seemed with the happiness of the present day all about her! The walk with this wonderful new friend, the play, Clythie being so kind about giving Una the best role, so many happy things. It was a far greater comfort than she knew, telling Phillippe's mother about that unhappy day. Some of it still weighed on her heart and she had never spoken of it to anyone. She told

it all, first of the disobedience in going to the old wing, of her meeting with Phillippe (which adventure his mother already knew about from him), then of the day when everything had seemed gray and sad, the promenade in the morning, finding the forbidden door unlocked and going into the old wing again, her meeting with Madame and the punishment she had given her.

Mehitable looked up at her friend as she told her this. "I'm not complaining—I deserved it," she said. Her companion nodded, but did not speak, and Mehitable went on with her story. She told of going off alone to the unused room in the Long Gallery and, with burning cheeks, haltingly she told of the conversation she had unwittingly overheard. She did not say who the girls were. She told of going to the old tree in the garden, of weeping, of the little bird that had seemed to talk to her. "And then you came," she added looking up at her new friend.

There was silence for a few minutes after Mehitable finished her little story of the sad day. Then young Madame said softly. "The little bird said all the right things to comfort and help you dear, but oh, you poor pathetic child," she exclaimed. She had not intended to say this at all. She put her arm around Mehitable as she spoke. For a moment she could not think of just the comforting thing for her, and could only keep a motherly arm around her, as they walked along the winding gravel path.

"I didn't mean to make it all seem quite so unhappy," Mehitable said. "I've been so foolish to let it seem such a trouble. It was because it all came together, the sad day and the punishment and then—then—hearing the girls talking." She smiled up at her companion. "It all seems so unreal, so

silly now. This is such a wonderful day, with the play and seeing you," she added shyly.

"We shall be real friends, you, Phillippe, and I. I feel sure of that," answered Phillippe's mother.

Mehitable found herself telling about the play and how Una was to be "Lost Noreen." Her new friend listened very eagerly as Mehitable talked about it, and when she had finished said, "It's a pity that there isn't a part that a boy could play."

"But there is!" exclaimed Mehitable. "We can't make up our minds who had better be the one to act him."

"Why not Phillippe?" asked Madame de Villiers smiling.

Mehitable stood still in the middle of the path and clasped her hands together. "Phillippe," she said joyfully. "Oh,—could he—would he—would Madame allow it? Phillippe, what fun!"

"Yes," answered the other still smiling. "If you all want him, I am sure that Phillippe will think it a splendid lark to be the boy in 'Lost Noreen'."

CHAPTER XVI

"LOST NOREEN"

The next few days flew by and the holiday came before they knew it. It rained hard in the morning, and was still drizzling when various little bands of girls started to Paris for the afternoon. Una, Clythie, and the others who were to act in the play in the evening, stayed in and they all had a busy afternoon. There was a great deal to do, and many rather perplexing questions to settle, for the Chateau had no conveniences for private theatricals and they were obliged to stage the play in the petite salle à manger, which led from the larger room.

The first and last acts were a schoolroom scene, and the middle one in a wood. The salle à manger had a green carpet, and this with some leaves scattered over it and the old green scene as a background made quite an effective wood setting. No one knew where the scene had come from, but an old governess, Mademoiselle Merdaille, told them it had been there all the twenty years that she had known the Chateau. It had been freshly painted by one of the girls not long before, and made quite a vivid green effect at the back of the room. There were several trees painted on it and a very yellow bird was perched on one of the branches. It helped to make quite a presentable wood scene, with a real log in one corner and all the plants in the school and from Madame's house put together in the other.

Phillippe had learned his part and had rehearsed with them several times. He was there that last afternoon for the dress

rehearsal and that time they all felt that he was one of them and all liked him. He entered into it with almost as much enthusiasm as he gave to his riding in the Bois. Indeed this was something new, and it was an odd experience to be a part of the Chateau life, when before it had been such a closed book to him.

To Mehitable, those few days before the holiday were happy beyond words. In spite of all the mishaps, and there were several, she enjoyed the fun of the rehearsals. Of course the old painted scene would topple over, and there was always the fear that it might disgrace them at the final performance, but somehow it didn't seem to matter. Tip was very trying, for she was in great spirits, and played all the pranks she could, hinting at others she had thought of for the real performance before the school, but she made such a capital Brownie that they all forgave her.

Phillippe and Mehitable had quite a talk together at the dress rehearsal, for the "theatrical troupe," as Tip called them, were more or less alone in their glory. Mehitable sat down on the log, the wood scene just being over. She was a little tired, but smiled cheerfully at Phillippe, as he sat beside her.

"Aren't Tip and Una splendid?" he said enthusiastically.

"And you Mehitable, to think you wrote the play! What would they say about it in Cherryville, I wonder! I know they'd say you were regularly splendid." He folded his hands about his gray-clad knees and smiled at Mehitable. "I know some secrets," he whispered, "but I'm not going to tell any of them so don't tease to know."

"Is your mother in any of them?" asked Mehitable.

Phillippe nodded. "Mother's in everything that's nice, and fun," he said, but he wouldn't say any more and just then the maid brought tea into the big dining room. They all had a

merry tea together and were quite elated over the fresh hot madelaines that were allowed, because it was a holiday, sponge cake made into crisp, fat, shell-like dainties. There were two each, and plum jam as well.

"I wonder what we'll have for refreshments to-night," surmised Tip as they sat at tea.

"The usual thing of course," answered Una, "an eclair for each of us. They're so good, if only they were bigger."

"Perhaps to-night things will be more elaborate," put in Phillippe. "But nothing will ever be as much fun as our midnight feast," he added, eating his second madelaine slowly.

"Hush," admonished Clythie, "we've never been discovered and it's the one triumph of the year."

Clythie was not as pleased as the others about having Phillippe in the play. He did his part well and was quite a little gentleman, with all his fun. She admitted that, but he was only in short knickerbockers. He wasn't yet fifteen and he always seemed to want to talk to Mehitable or Una about riding and horses, or odd old stories about the Chateau, that did not interest Clythie.

"He and Mehitable have some secret in common I do believe," she thought, as she saw them whispering and smiling.

Mehitable had tried several times to talk to him about his mother, but somehow the friendship was so new, the walk in the garden so recent and the joy in her heart over the new friendship with them both, so great, she was shy about speaking of it.

Her heart beat high with excitement when she peered through a hole in the flimsy old curtain that evening and saw a tall figure in white with a soft blue scarf about her shoulders sitting beside Madame in the front row, and knew that it was the mother of Phillippe, realized that Madame was there to

see a play that she had written and in which, oh, wonder of wonders, Phillippe was going to act. She and Gladys pulled a string and the curtain drew open.

This was the play.

LOST NOREEN

Cast of Characters

Lost Noreen ..... *Una O'Hara*
Brownie ..... *Theodora Manders (Tip)*
Eldest Sister ..... *Clythie Grey*
Second Sister ..... *Jean Hetherington Macey*
Little Sister..... *Betty White (youngest Chateau girl)*
Brother ..... *Phillippe de Villiers*
Nurse ..... *Nancy Graeme*
Mother ..... *Etta Slowburn*

LOST NOREEN

SCENE I

(Schoolroom, table covered with books, sewing basket, a doll on floor by table, several chairs scattered about, fireplace in one corner, three girls sit around table, boy kneels on rug in front of fire mending a little boat.)

FIRST SISTER. (*throwing down her book*). Oh, this tiresome rainy day! Ink and books and stupid people!

SECOND SISTER. (*looking up*). What is the matter with us all to-day? You've been so snappy all the afternoon.

BOY. Stop quarreling girls. There, the boat is mended. How I wish that nurse would bring in tea.

ELDEST SISTER. Nurse! How silly it is to have a nurse, big children as we are. Why I'm fourteen.

BOY. (*standing up, goes over and puts the boat on the window sill*). Yes, but then we've always had her, and mother will never let her go because she knew Noreen.

LITTLE SISTER. (*picking up her doll, leans toward eldest sister*). Sister, tell about Noreen.

ELDEST SISTER. (*rising*). Come over to the fire then. (*The two go over and sit down on the rug by the fire. Older one puts arm around little one*). You know the story already, Pet. You know how our dear sister Noreen was stolen when she was a baby. She was playing in the rose garden. Nurse went to fetch something, and when she came back Noreen was gone.

(*Boy sits on window sill. Second sister leans her elbow on the table listening*).

LITTLE SISTER. Where did she go?

ELDEST SISTER. We think the fairies took her. The grown-ups laugh at this, but still I think it's true. Oh, Noreen, Noreen, can you never come back and tell us? (*Bows head on clasped hands. Little sister puts her arms around her*).

BOY. (*jumping up from window sill*). One night I dreamed she came and told us all about her home in fairyland. It was a jolly dream.

(*Door at side opens and nurse enters carrying tray. She is short and wears a gingham dress, white apron, cap and spectacles. On the tray is a jug of milk, cake and bread, and a pot of jam*).

NURSE. How dark it's grown outside. I think we'll have a storm. Come children don't you see I'm waiting for you to clear the table?

(*Girls and boy take off the school books and nurse puts down the tea tray. They all help to put the plates around. Then sit down at the table. Nurse goes over and looks out of window*).

NURSE. The garden seems all of a quiver. I can see the roses tossing in the wind.

BOY. (*helping himself to jam*). It's a May night Nursie, and they say the fairies come and dance around the flowers.

SECOND SISTER. It must be such a long way to come to Human Land.

NURSE. (*drawing down shade*). Tush, what nonsense. Fairies! (*Puts her apron to her eyes.*) Oh, Noreen, my baby come back to me. Ten years to-day since you went away. Come back to us all. Come back.

(*Children sit watching her as curtain goes down.*)

SCENE II

(*Wood in fairyland. Log in center of stage, which is empty. Laughter in distance. Girl runs on stage, wears short white dress, hair falls about her shoulders, carries a basket of flowers. She dances lightly about the stage, looking back over her shoulder.*)

LOST NOREEN. He's lost me. Oh, how cross he will be. If he finds me he will have to wish upon his fairy ring, I'm sure, and he has only three more wishes for this week.

(*Jumps as a brownie comes running on the stage. He wears brown suit, pointed cap. Tosses his head as he comes up to her.*)

BROWNIE. Of course I'm here. I only let you think you had escaped me. What a game of tag we've had. Let's rest awhile upon this log.

(*They both sit down on the log. Tip upsets the basket of flowers. Noreen picks up flowers and puts them back tenderly.*)

LOST NOREEN. Be gentle with the flowers.

BROWNIE. Be gentle with the flowers? You know they cannot die.

NOREEN. How strange it would be to live in Human Land where flowers fade away. How sad!

BROWNIE. Strange indeed, so strange I never want to have a look at it. (*Jumps up waving his arms about. Hums a tune and dances slowly all about the stage, stops suddenly and comes up to where Noreen is sitting on the log.*)

BROWNIE. You and I, Noreen, are the happiest creatures in the wood. Even the birds seem to envy us. Jolly little grandpa Robin, by the well, told me only yesterday that he thought we were the gayest creatures in the wood. (*He dances again, a little slowly, singing a quaint little song.*)

Through the dusky wood,
By the silver stream,
We can play the live long day,
Where pink wild roses gleam.

(*Noreen clasps her hands about her knees and joins in the little song.*)

Fireflies are our friends,
Birds and trees and flowers.
Through the glen we dance and sing,
All the fragrant hours.

NOREEN. (*looking off dreamingly*). Sometimes I long for Human Land, just to see what it is like. Sometimes I'm tired of just the wood, even of the dear bird friends.

(*She bends over and touches the flowers.*) Even of the flowers.

BROWNIE. (*coming up to her, speaks quickly in an alarmed sort of way*). Surely you do not mean that you wish ever to go to Human Land? Why, your heart would soon be broken there, just everyday things all the time. Why, do you know (*comes nearer her and speaks wonderingly*) they say—old twisted legged Dr. Frog told me, when I had supper with him by the brook the other night that in Human Land the animals are dumb. They never, never speak or sing or dance about. Just fancy that!

NOREEN. (*shaking her head sadly*). *Fancy that!* (*she repeats*) Still, Brownie, I long, and long to go, just to see it for myself. To see my sisters and my brother; to play with them, and do you know (*leans towards him as she speaks*) sometimes I feel that they are calling for me.

BROWNIE. (*sitting beside her, looks at her anxiously*). Noreen, Noreen, what are you saying? Why I thought you were so gay and glad and were so happy, playing all the day. Oh, would you go away and leave me?

NOREEN. (*restlessly*). Oh, just for a time, Brownie. Just to see them a little, but (*sadly*) it can never be.

BROWNIE. (*getting up slowly, stands for several seconds with his head bowed on his clasped hands. He is very still as though thinking deeply. Then he turns and slowly takes off a ring from his finger*). We have been real friends, and I would rather give you this than anything. Take the wishing ring—my godfather's birthday gift to me and fly to Human Land. (*Speaks sadly.*)

NOREEN. (*starting up excitedly*). Brownie, dear Brownie! Oh—oh, do you mean it? May I really go back just for

a wee, wee time? Just to see the dears so far away? You see I'm not a fairy, not all of me, and so I want just one brief glimpse of those that love me, back there. (*She puts her arm on Brownie's shoulder*). How good you are! And I'll come back so soon. We will dance and dance, and, who knows, perhaps this year the Man in the Moon will think we're old enough to come to his June Ball. Oh, we shall have a merry time, the whole summer through, when I come back to Fairyland.

BROWNIE. (*both standing together at front of stage; he speaks slowly, sadly*). Yes, yes, perhaps we shall—who knows. (*He puts the ring on Noreen's finger. She shuts her eyes, silently wishing, touches Brownie lightly on the shoulder and very slowly walks backward and vanishes at the back of the stage*).

BROWNIE. (*holding out both his arms, calls after her*). Noreen, Noreen, come back again! Come back!

Curtain

SCENE III

(*Schoolroom again, children sitting about the table eating their supper. Two candles are lit giving a little light*).

SECOND SISTER. Pass the jam please. Why, Brother, you've had three pieces of cake, how greedy you are.

BROTHER. Don't preach, but cut me one more slice of bread. Rainy days are hungry days for me.

SECOND SISTER. (*smiling*). All days are hungry days for you. (*Cuts him another slice from the loaf and puts it on the plate he hands her*).

LITTLE SISTER. (*getting up, goes over to the window, pulls back the curtain. Light comes in*). See, it's stopped rain-

ing, and the garden looks like gold. *The two other girls stand up and go over to the window and look out*).

ELDEST SISTER. Why the whole world seems to be shining. See the roses tossing in the evening wind, and all the trees whispering. See how they bend toward each other just as though they were really talking. You know (*She turns toward the others and whispers*) little Lame Tom in the village told me that in fairyland the trees and flowers can talk—fancy that.

LITTLE SISTER. (*wonderingly*). Fancy that!

(*Brother gets up and comes over to the window. Stands looking out with the girls*).

(*Door at side opens softly. Noreen enters, wearing same white dress, and carrying same basket of flowers. Stands in center of room watching the others. They turn suddenly and see her. All start back in surprise. Little Sister takes hand of Eldest Sister. Noreen kneels down, puts out arms toward Little Sister.*)

NOREEN. Come, Little Sister, I'm Noreen from Fairyland.

(*Little Sister runs over to her and puts her arms around her, smiling back at the others, who stand staring at Noreen in astonishment. Noreen holds out her hands toward them*).

NOREEN. Sisters and Brother, I've come all the way from Fairyland because I wanted you. I've wanted you so long. I've thought of you even in the midst of dancing with the pixies on the hill or sailing down the opal streams of fairyland. Why even at the party of the Fairy Queen, I said to myself, "If only Sisters dear were here and Brother too."

BROTHER. (*coming slowly toward her*). How can you know us? Why you were only three when the fairies took you.

OLDEST SISTER. I always said they stole you away. Oh, Noreen, why have you been gone so long, so long? (*She comes close to Noreen and gazes at her.*)

NOREEN. Because I was very happy where I was. You see the Brownie is my chum and we could dance and sing and play and we had many friends to visit.

SECOND SISTER. Won't you have some tea with us. We were at supper.

(*Noreen nods and they all go over and sit down at the table. Noreen sits at the head of the table and Brother pours her a cup of milk. They all cluster about her as she eats and drinks.*)

ELDEST SISTER. Tell us about your friends, Noreen.

NOREEN (*looking off rather dreamily*). There was dear old Dr. Frog, who lived by the brook, and old Mr. Robin and Simon, the dear chipmunk, and all the birds we knew and we had such gay times with all of them.

BROTHER (*leaning toward her*). It must be jolly to have a Brownie for a friend.

LITTLE SISTER. And do the frogs and robins really talk?

NOREEN (*putting arms around her*). Oh, yes, indeed they do, and roses too, and all the flowers. They've told me many things. Oh, secrets many times. They sing too. Here's a little song that I heard a wood nymph sing. Shall we go over to the fire and I'll sing it for you?

(*They all go over and sit down on the rug by the fire. Noreen in the center.*)

NOREEN (*singing softly*):

In fairyland, in fairyland,
We can hear the flowers sing,
The thrushes talk, and, in the wood,
The pretty bluebells ring.

In fairyland, in fairyland,
We go to see the sun,
And chase the moonbeams through the glen,
And dance, and laugh with fun.

We never have to go to bed,
We drink the fairy dew,
And have wild berries for our food,
On dishes silver blue.

LITTLE SISTER. Don't you have to do lessons and don't you really go to bed?

NOREEN (*laughing softly*). No, Little Sister, but tell me what do you do, all of you? (*She looks around at them.*)

BIG SISTER. Oh, lessons, and fun too.

NOREEN. Just to sit here by the fire seems a happy thing. You are all together. You'll miss me when I'm gone. Where's mother?

ELDEST SISTER. Oh, you mustn't see mother—not unless you'll stay for always.

SECOND SISTER. No, no, that would never do, because you see if you should go again her heart would break.

BROTHER. No, she must never know you came unless you stay for always here. She could not bear to see you go.

NOREEN (*standing up and clasping her hands*). But I must see my mother. That's the realest reason that I came. (*All shake their heads.*)

ELDEST SISTER. Oh, Noreen, stay with us. Stay, we want you so, and we will try to make you happy. We're not fairy children, but we'll do our best. I will dance for you. (*Eldest Sister picks up a scarf from a chair and dances. When she finishes she sinks down beside Noreen, who clasps her hands.*)

LITTLE SISTER (*going over to the table, picks up her doll, goes back and hands it to Noreen*). See, sister, if you'll stay, I'll give you darling Susan.

NOREEN. Oh, how sweet you are, I love you all.

SECOND SISTER. If you'll stay, Noreen, I'll let you have my rainbow sash and coral beads. We'll have a party in the woods and you can be Queen of the May.

BROTHER (*taking his boat from the window seat, comes back with it*). Here is my boat. It's a new one. You can have it for your own and I will teach you how to sail it, unless perhaps you're too grown up for that, and I will teach you how to swim and ride. We'll gallop over moors and heather and, oh, we'll have such happy times. Oh, stay, Noreen.

ELDEST SISTER. You and I can share my bed and talk at night. We'll tell each other secrets and we'll have such happy dreams. Oh, Noreen, Noreen——

NOREEN (*shaking her head sadly*). What would the Brownie do without me?

(*Just then a voice is heard calling softly.*)

BROWNIE'S VOICE. Noreen, Noreen, you said you would come back.

(*They all listen. Moonlight comes in through window. Suddenly Brownie appears.*)

BROWNIE. You're listening to the human children and you want to stay. Have you forgotten fairyland? (*He comes to the middle front of stage.*)

NOREEN. No, no, I'm coming with you, Brownie.

CHILDREN (*entreatingly*). No, Noreen, dear Noreen, stay.

BROWNIE. (*coming close to her and bending toward her*). Noreen, Lost Noreen, your fairy friends are waiting for you. I've a message for you from the Man in the Moon. You're coming to his ball. I've missed you so, and all

the birds and flowers have asked for you. Come, Noreen, come.

(*He takes her hand and she goes with him slowly toward the window, looking back and sadly throwing kisses at the children, who stretch their arms toward her.*)

NOREEN. I wish that I could stay. I love you so and could be happy with you.

BROWNIE. You'd rather be where flowers speak and birds and beasts befriend you, where all the days are beautiful and there is only pleasure. I gave the fairy ring to you for friendship's sake. Will you not come with me?

(*They reach the window. The door opens and Nurse appears, calls out.*)

NURSE. Noreen, Noreen, my baby, sweet Noreen.

(*Noreen hesitates. Brownie still holds her arm, whispering*).

BROWNIE. Come.

(*Nurse moves to one side of door. Mother enters. Wears white dress. Cries out and, kneeling down, throws out her arms. When Brownie sees her he lets go of Noreen's arm. Turns and buries his face hopelessly in his arms and goes swiftly toward window, alone. Noreen stands still for a moment and then with a cry rushes into her mother's arms. Looks back at window where Brownie is poised on sill ready for flight. He looks back over his shoulder.*)

NOREEN (*still kneeling with her mother's arms about her, the children and Nurse clustered around her*). Brownie dear, I cannot, cannot go with you, I must stay here. I've found my mother now.

BROWNIE (*sadly*). Yes, you must stay, Noreen. You'll never come again to Fairyland. When mothers call, there is

no power of ours that has a charm, for mothers are more wonderful than fairies. Think of me sometimes in the moonlight. Goodbye—Goodbye.

(*Curtain falls and Brownie disappears, leaving the group by the fire looking after him.*)

There was loud and sincere applause from the little audience when the curtain was drawn on the last act, and suddenly a voice, a very English voice, called softly, "Author." The name was repeated and soon everyone was calling it. Una pushed Mehitable toward the curtain.

"They mean you," she whispered. "You must go out and bow."

Mehitable shrank back, but Una still pushed her gently forward and she found herself standing alone in front of the curtain, facing the big dining room and the many faces upturned to her. The presence of Madame made her so shy that she could think of no words to say, and could only bow, a funny little bow that they had been taught to make in the little school at Cherryville before they had recited their "pieces" on Friday afternoons. Madame's face was the only one she seemed to see, even the pale beautiful English face of Phillippe's mother was lost to her. Madame's face stared up at her, Madame, whom she did not know at all. Madame's eagle gaze, a little severe always, but now so softened, puzzled, kindly.

One of the secrets Phillippe knew must have been the refreshments, for they were so wonderful as to take away the breath for a moment of everyone. Ice cream! Oh, fascinating French ices.

"Rumpelmeyer's, yes," whispered Tip to Mehitable, as they sat at the center table together with Una on the other side, and

Clythie and Jean and the others just across from them.

Yes, the ices were wonderful indeed. They were pink and green and gold, and they were fashioned into all sorts of odd shapes, flowers, and cupids and fruits. They were so pretty, so exquisite, that the more artistic really hesitated about eating theirs, but when they began to melt a little, gave that as an excuse for doing so.

"What in the world does this mean?" whispered Clythie across to Una. "In all our years here there has never been anything like this before."

The cakes, too, were wonders to behold. Cherry tartlets topped with cream, pistache eclairs with Marrons glacées in the center, long eclairs of rose color icing with candied cherries covering them. The pupils at the Chateau d'Estes were breathless with surprise, or rather the old ones were, those who knew some of Madame's decided ideas about the dangers of eating sweets, and such sweets.

"This is better than fairyland," remarked Tip, selecting a very plump marron cream eclair.

She still wore her Brownie dress and her eyes peered very mischievously out from under the pointed cap. The girls were proud of Tip, for someway the Brownie part had suited her exactly and there had been much pathos in her rendering of it.

"Who would ever have thought she could do it so well, that she really could be serious?" said Una in a low voice to Mehitable, under cover of some laughter as Tip and Phillippe bandied words back and forth. He sat at his grandmother's left hand and young Madame at her right, and they were at the same table as the young actors of "Lost Noreen."

"Tip is fine," Mehitable whispered back.

She was so happy that everyone seemed splendid to her

then, even Clythie. At that moment, Madame stood up and motioned hastily for them all to sit, for the school, as was their custom, was about to stand with her. Madame looked very stately in her black velvet gown. She spoke in English, as it was a holiday and they were all allowed to do so.

"I am glad to be back with you, glad to be better in health from my sojourn at Vichy. I shall now, at once, try to make the acquaintance of the new girls and renew my acquaintance with the old," as she said this she glanced rather piercingly at Una, Clythie, and Tip. "I trust that in my absence you respected still my authority. And now," she went on, "I wish to tell you that this is my grandson's birthday, and it is because of this very great day, to us, that he is giving you the little treat." Madame paused. So far her speech had been exactly as were all her English speeches, very cut and dried, for she could not express herself in that language though she understood it well. When she spoke again, however, her voice sounded different to them all. "This is a very happy day for me, for us all, and I am glad that my grandson can have this ending to what is his happiest birthday."

That was all she said, but the applause was great, and the girls looked at her for a moment with new eyes. The real Madame had for a moment shown herself.

They all looked at Phillippe and Tip, in a spirit of mischief, called "Speech," waving her hand toward Phillippe. He had turned quite red under his tan. He bit his lip and—yes, he looked very sulky, so cross, in fact, that his eyebrows came together in a frown, and a very dogged look settled about his lips. For, in spite of his French name and his French grandmother, Phillippe was English, so English that the thought of making a speech, of the sudden publicity into which he was thrown, was very terrible to him. Still the cry of "Speech"

went on. His grandmother looked at him expectantly, but it was not until he met his mother's gaze, very grave and expectant too, that he rose to his feet. He met Tip's eyes as she smiled in delight at his confusion, and he smiled, suddenly forgot his shyness, and looked about at the sea of faces in the big room.

"Why, I can't make a speech," he said. "I never did in my life. I don't know how, but I'll say this, I've not had such a happy birthday in a long time. Grandmother is right. The best part of it has been Mehitable's play, and I say three cheers for Mehitable Webster—hip-hip-hurrah."

The ending of his speech was so unexpected that for an instant there was silence and then such a cheer as went up. Mehitable looked down at her plate, the color was high in her cheeks and her eyes were very bright. The author of "Lost Noreen" could only smile her thanks.

CHAPTER XVII

MEHITABLE'S DIARY

November 30. I've been too busy, until to-day, to write in you, dear diary. After the holiday we all had to work very hard. Mademoiselle Gelére gave us long lists of words to learn—and, oh, the verbs—but I'm not going to write of anything as stupid as verbs in my birthday diary.

Thanksgiving was such a funny day, just like any other, except that you couldn't help but know that way over in your own country it was a rejoicing sort of day with most all the people that have not seen each other for a long time gathering together. We even had mutton for dinner that night instead of the nice chicken and salad we have sometimes. Clythie asked Madame if we could speak English in the evening, but she said "No." She is always very strict after a holiday, they say. I felt sort of homesick, at dinnertime especially. I was thinking of Cherryville all the time, of all the real Thanksgiving dinners we've had. Barbara and her father, Miss Prince, the dressmaker, and old Major Stubbs, who knew Grandpa, always had dinner with us. I thought of the turkey and squash, and the mince pies, but most of all I thought of the after-dinner time when Robin and Johnnie and the Bentlys came over and we popped corn over the coals in the sitting room. Old Major Stubbs would sing his funny song about the Galloping Major—must stop, bell ringing.

December 1. When I woke up yesterday morning I was so glad to welcome in December, for it came over me like a flash that *now* I would be able to go to Paris on the half holidays.

I think that Madame felt a little sorry that she punished me quite so hard, for she spoke very kindly to me after the play and called me "ma chérie." How pretty that is, though *Mignon* is lovelier. I love to think of that evening. It was such a happy time. I'm not sure which scene of the play I liked best. Noreen and Brownie in the wood, or no, the last, just the very last, where Noreen almost goes back to fairy-land, and then the mother comes.

December 4. I could have written on for ages the other day, was just in the mood, but of course, the "cloche" sounded, it always does. I was writing about Lost Noreen when I was last interrupted and I think I'll go on for a bit, though I ought to be putting down the every day school happenings as I told Barbie I would. Nothing really seems "every day" here, though. It's all so interesting. (I don't like the word interesting, wish someone would invent a new one.) I think the mother in Lost Noreen must have been like Madame—young Madame of course, Phillippe's wonderful mother. She is the realest mother in the world. I can see it in her eyes. Does Phillippe know that? I suppose he does, but he has always had her.

December 6. I had to stop the last time because Miss Derk came up and asked me what I was doing. Before I could answer her, she said I must have the history exercise ready by evening and then went on to someone else. Oh, I'm glad she didn't ask again. What if she had taken you away from me, dear diary! Oh, that would have been the worst thing that could happen. It would hurt so much, for you are part of home. Who knows, perhaps my grandchildren or Barbara's, will read you—will read of all the things their dear old grandmother did so long ago in France.

December 8. Oh, how can I write all I have to say. I've no

time for half of it, but will start right in anyway. Yesterday at tea, Madame's maid appeared in the doorway of the dining room and remarked that Mademoiselle Webster and Mademoiselle O'Hara were wanted by Madame. For a minute we had that sinking sort of feeling that seems to come over you when you are summoned to Madame. We looked at each other and wondered what we had done. There were several little things that we might be called for. Well, we followed Mathilde upstairs, knocked on Madame's door and when we heard her *"Entrez,"* we opened the door and went in. It was the first time I'd been there since the night I came with Fräulein. Madame sat at her desk and looked up in that quick, sharp way she has of doing. She motioned us to sit down and went on writing for a few minutes. They weren't very comfortable ones for Una and me. Then she looked up and said, Oh, it is something so wonderful! She said that her daughter-in-law, who had been away at a house party near Limoges for a week, had returned. We knew that she had been away, for Phillippe had had Sunday dinner at school and had told us so. Madame went on to say that her daughter-in-law wished us to go to the opera with her and Phillippe, and, as she was busy with friends, had sent us a note. "I do not greatly approve," Madame said to us. "It is not well to pick out a girl here and there for an especial treat, but it is my daughter-in-law's wish and I have consented. Here is the note, you are to go to-morrow night. See that you conduct yourselves properly, and remember that such favors do not come often." Those were her very words. We only said, "Merci, Madame," over and over again and it wasn't until we were outside the door that we hugged each other and fairly danced around, though we had to do this very quietly. We read the note then. It's quite short and I think I'll copy it right in you, diary.

"Dear both of you! Phillippe and I want Mehitable and 'Lost Noreen' to go to see Hansel and Gretel with us to-morrow night, so we can all be together in fairyland again. Joan Margaret de Villiers."

Oh, to-night, will you ever, ever come! Can I wait! Can I sit through an hour of "le grammaire!"

Next afternoon. It's over! We've been to fairyland with Hansel and Gretel. I'll begin and tell about it from the time we went upstairs early to get ready. I'd been thinking about the cherry and white dress and made up my mind that I'd just forget all about it, and not let it spoil my fun. When I was ready I looked in the glass and tried to imagine that I was all in white and that I had a very pale green sash around my waist. I suppose it's foolish to care. Anyway I had such a good time afterward that I forgot all about it. Una and I had dinner a little earlier than usual and that seemed so strange. We were neither of us hungry and didn't touch the pudding, though it was that nice soufflé kind.

Phillippe and his mother were waiting for us in the taxi and we had the happiest ride into Paris. The snow was falling outside, and Paris seemed different with the snow covering it. It seemed so quiet and I loved it more than ever. I sat next to young Madame. She put her arm around me part of the time and I just tried to think I was really going to my first opera with my own mother. I thought of Barbara, too, and the boys. What would Robin think of the opera, I wondered.

Because of the crowds we had to go very slowly, and we hardly realized that our taxi had stopped until a gendarme opened the door. He spoke to Phillippe and so quickly that I did not understand what he said. Phillippe questioned him for a minute and then turned and spoke to us in English. "He says there is such a crowd ahead, a procession for some for-

eign royalties, that we'll have to get out." He helped his mother, and Una and I jumped out before he could turn around for us. We found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of people who all seemed to be talking at once. Some were screaming and they began suddenly to push close around us as the crowd ahead was shoved back. Just for a few minutes it was very dreadful, being closed in in that way and feeling it all coming nearer and nearer. I was frightened and had to remember very hard about Grandfather, but the others were so quiet and almost serene, that I didn't like to say anything. Phillippe's mother was very pale, but she gave me such a cheering smile and kept her arm around me all the time, and Una! Why Una was laughing, her eyes shone and she whispered to Phillippe, "It's something like what the Donnybrook fair used to be, I fancy!" Is it because Una is Irish that danger seems somehow to put her in the wildest spirits?

Women began to scream as the soldiers ahead of us shouted orders, and a dark looking man suddenly took a little girl up in his arms and held her on his shoulder away from the crowd. Ahead of us we could see flashing lights and hear music. "It's the torchlight procession," said Phillippe, turning and looking at me. "Don't mind it, Mehitable," he added, "it won't last long and I'll take care of you." He had the same dogged look about his mouth that had been there when we had all called for him to make a speech at his birthday supper, only he was very quiet and unexcited. "He will make a good soldier," I thought, as he spoke to me.

Suddenly there was a screaming louder than before. The crowd swerved the other way. There was a space through for an instant and somehow we found ourselves on the sidewalk. I heard Phillippe pounding on a glass window back of us and saying to an old man who half opened the door for us, "Let us

in at once. My father is Major de Villiers." The old man still protested and Phillippe said quietly again, "I tell you that my father is Major de Villiers. Does that mean nothing to you? In the name of the Republic, I say, let us in."

The crowd pressed close. Someone near us fell to the ground. There were more screams. Still Phillippe stood there quietly pleading with, or rather commanding, the old man in the shop. Suddenly he opened the door a little more and we stepped inside. It was a funny little shop. We hardly noticed it, I think, and were there for only a few moments, for as quickly as the crowd had come, it seemed to disappear. When the procession had finally passed, the congestion was relieved at once, for the people followed it. "It is that way in France," explained Phillippe as we sat there in the dark shop. His mother looked at him, a smile just touched her lips. She was still very pale and had her arm about me as I sat beside her on the bench by the door. Her cloak fell away from her shoulders and showed a diamond chain that sparkled at her throat. There was a strange look in her eyes as she smiled at Phillippe. Was it because of what he said about his father? "There is a secret about him," I thought, and yet Phillippe spoke to the old shop man as though he must know about it. Could it be something that had happened in the great world outside the Chateau?

We were late, of course, at the opera, but not very, because for some reason it was late in starting. We sat in a box and that was such fun. It had red furniture and there was a sofa in one corner. Una and Phillippe sat in front and his mother and I just behind them. We were a little in the shadow and I saw that Madame closed here eyes as though she were tired. The music came to us softly, sadly, it seemed trying to tell about all the fairy tales in the world. And the opera! I'd

never seen anything like it before. I'd never dreamed about what an opera would be like, for I couldn't someway—and *never* could I have dreamed the music. I have always loved Hansel and Gretel, and it was so dear to see them there in the wood—to hear the cuckoo song and then when they fell asleep under the tree, to see the angels come to watch over them. I felt the tears in my eyes and when they began to run down my cheeks, Madame gave me her handkerchief to wipe them away, because I couldn't find mine. I'm going to call her "mother" when I write in you, dear diary. I think of her as "mother," and I don't believe she would mind. Shall we ever talk together again as we did in the garden, I wonder? She is the loveliest thing to think about, and it cannot hurt anyone for me to think of her as mother.

December 10. I wrote so long yesterday that the bell for prayers rang while I was in the middle of a sentence. Now I must go on and tell more about Hansel and Gretel, but I can't quite tell all my thoughts about it. All night afterward, I could hear the cuckoo song echoing through the woods, the melody of it seemed to sing and sing to me.

December 14. How the days fly by! We went Christmas shopping yesterday and it seemed to be the real holiday time already. I couldn't do any shopping, but it was great fun looking in the windows and imagining what I would buy if I could. Aunt Comfort would not let me have the little allowance that Mrs. Lindsay offered to give me. I suppose she is right, for I am accepting so much from her. But it would be so interesting to have just a little money to spend.

I saw several things that would be so splendid for different friends for Christmas. Well, I sent some very pretty cards to Aunt Comfort and the boys and Barbara and of

course, to dear Desire and Silas. I wonder what Desire would think of Paris!

December 27. Christmas has come and gone, and I've so much to write about. Oh, diary, how I love you! All the time I'm doing things, I keep thinking "how splendid this will be to put in my diary." Think how I'll love to read it to Barbie some day. I want to write first about the days just before Christmas. They were such busy, happy ones. We used to sew every evening after dinner, and it was all quite mysterious, because we would not let each other see what we were doing. A great many of the English girls went home for the two weeks' vacation, but Una stayed, Tip, Clythie and Gladys, and about a dozen others. Nancy went to the old aunties in Scotland and a few days before she left she asked me if I'd go with her. "We don't have any foolishness at our Christmas, none at all. We ask the minister to dinner and we eat the plum pudding that Aunt Janet is famous for. It's all very quiet, but you're welcome enough to share it if you want to come home with me." When Nancy said this to me, I had the strangest feeling, a sort of gratitude, and more than that, the dreamlike feeling I've had so often, since coming to the Chateau. A friend was asking me to come and visit her in Scotland, to spend Christmas in her own home—a home where you could see the "auld brig o' Doone" from the front windows—a home so near to the haunted church that Burns had funny Tam o' Shanter see, that you could drive there any afternoon in a pony cart! Six months before I'd never seen her, yet she was asking me now to come home with her! "Oh, Nancy," I said, "if only I could!" Of course I couldn't, but it made me so happy that she seemed to want me. "Oh, well, some day I dare say you'll find yourself up around our way," she answered.

Oh, dear, it's so nice to think it's vacation, and that I can write on for as long as I like, and know that no one will interrupt me.

New Year's Eve. Someone did interrupt. It was Tip, saying they were all going to sing songs up in the practise rooms and didn't I want to come, too. So I just left off before telling about Christmas, and went with her. The day before Christmas we were busy trimming the tree. It was such a funny little tree, so small we had to put it on top of a table, but it was the very prettiest one I've ever seen. We decided to have it all white, and when it was finished late that afternoon and the others were getting ready for dinner, Una and I went to the schoolroom door and looked in at it. It stood all by itself in a shadowy corner. The white and silver trimmings glistening through the dusk and the little white angel with outstretched arms, smiled at us. Una and I didn't say anything, we only stood quietly looking at it and I think it was the happiest moment of all the Christmas time. That night at prayers we sang "Holy Night." Oh, it was so beautiful. All of us there together. I mean, those of us that were left. We sat near the front so that we would feel more together. The schoolroom had as Christmassy a look as it could have, with garlands of green over the doors and windows and clusters of holly everywhere. Madame read about the birth of the baby Jesus from the French Testament and it sounded so beautiful in French, I was so glad I could understand it.

Phillippe and his mother were there, sitting near the desk, and "Mother" was so beautiful in white with the dark fur about her. I've only seen her twice to speak to since the opera. Oh, I want to be with her and hear her talk to me. I feel so safe, so happy when I am near her. She doesn't know how

much I want her for a mother. If she did, would she be glad, I wonder?

That night we had great fun hanging up our stockings on the door knobs outside our rooms. We only did it on the spur of the moment and didn't really expect to have them filled. Una slept in my room that night. We asked Madame if she might, as it was Christmas Eve and Madame said yes. We stayed awake for a long time, and Una told me of Christmas in Ireland. She told me of the carols sung under their windows by the village children. It was the first Christmas that she had not spent at home, but this year her brother from India was coming in the spring and it had seemed best for her to wait and come home then. It is a very rough crossing over the Irish Channel in the middle of winter, and so she told me it was the most sensible thing to do, just for her to stay at the Chateau for Christmas.

"I'm not sensible enough to like it myself, Mehitable," she said to me, as we were talking, Christmas Eve. "Think what it means to me that you have stayed," I answered.

Christmas was almost as strange a day as Thanksgiving, for all the time I kept thinking of home—what were they all doing? Had my cards reached them? Did Barbara's father give her the material for the blue and white dress that she had wanted so long? Would they come over for dinner with Aunt Comfort or would they have their cousins, the Mathew family, with them, and would funny old Mattie Jennings come to help Barbie cook the dinner? In the midst of the fun, all day these thoughts would come to me. We did find something in our stockings. Una and I each found a bulky package of Edinburgh Rock that Nancy had directed Gladys to give us, and beside there was a silk muffler for me from

Nancy, a very pretty blue one that her cousin had knitted for her and which she said was too "fancy" for her. Clythie came into our room early Christmas morning. She wore a lovely rose-colored kimona and she had a big box of Huylers that had been sent to her from New York.

Breakfast was just the same as usual. After prayers some of us sang carols upstairs in one of the practise rooms, until eleven, when we all came down to the tree. Clythie and Una and I put the presents around the table, darkened the room a little, lighted the candles and then called to the others to come in. Madame was there and all the governesses, but Phillippe and his mother were with friends and would not be back until evening. Madame spoke to us just before we started to dance around the tree. "You are invited to come and have dinner with me," she announced. "All of you are to come to my apartments to-night."

We were almost too excited to speak, at least I was, and I know Una was too. "Such a thing has never happened before," she whispered to me. "We've never gone to her—never! Fancy dinner in the old wing. What a lark!" Then we all joined hands and danced around the tree, singing:

"Mon beau sapin, mon beau sapin
Comme j'aime ta verdure."

There were a great many surprises for me under the tree, for a big package had come for me from home and I'd not known anything about it. It had been kept for me and I had the fun of opening it myself. The writing on the outside was Aunt Comfort's, but when I'd taken off the paper covering and opened the box, I found there were presents from everyone. Desire had sent me a small loaf of her best fruit cake. It was the first thing I discovered. I broke a little piece right off and tasted it. My, but it was good. I could just feel home

all around me, as I ate it. Auntie sent me a pair of kid gloves and a new white flannel petticoat. Barbie's present was a lovely boudoir cap. She had written me that all the girls were wearing them. She made this one herself. It was pale blue silk under white muslin and it had a blue rosette on one side. Una admired it so much and we both tried it on right there in the midst of the presents. Robin and Johnnie sent met a big box of the gum drops we were always so fond of. That was the heaviest thing in the package because they were in a tin box. On the top of them was a Christmas card—not an ordinary one that you buy. This was one they had made. It was a kodak picture of Barbie and Lucy Graves and Robin and Erastus Peters, just about to slide down North Hill on the big toboggan. Oh, I was so glad to have it. I liked it the best of anything they sent. It was pasted on red cardboard and they had printed "Merry Christmas" under it in white ink. Gladys gave me a big box of Marquis Chocolates. I'm glad I made her the handkerchief.

Una was so interested in my things. Her box from home hadn't arrived yet, and she said she didn't believe it would before New Year's. She didn't seem to mind a bit. Said her family never got around to things like that until the last minute. She was quite used to it, and never bothered about it. We passed the gum drops and everyone seemed to like them, even Miss Derk said they were splendid. Una liked the sewing apron I made for her. It was white lawn and had pink cross stitches at the corners and a pocket edged wth pink. Una doesn't sew very much, but it's one of the few things I know how to make. She said it would be simply fine to wear when they make toffee at home on rainy days. Clythie gave Una a lovely handkerchief case filled with handkerchiefs with Una O'Hara embroidered on each one. Una was very pleased,

but she told me she always lost her handkerchiefs so quickly it really wasn't worth while to have nice ones.

The afternoon passed by and at half-past five we began to dress for the dinner at Madame's. We were all so excited at the thought of going over to the old wing. Someway I was so happy, I didn't think half as much about the check silk as usual. Una came in before I'd finished dressing and said she was sorry her present for me hadn't come, because I could have worn it to Madame's dinner. She said she had ordered it from home and that it would be with her own things when her box came. At first she wouldn't tell me what it was, but on the way to the old wing she relented and said it was a Tara brooch. She said I'd have to wait and see what it was like for she wouldn't tell me any more.

Madame was waiting for us just inside the door of—what room do you suppose, diary? Why the great ballroom, the farthest one, near the stairway leading to the room where I first say Phillippe. Some rugs were laid about on the floor and there was a huge fire in the stone fireplace. Madame looked so smiling and nice, not a bit scarey, as she generally does. There were fifteen of us, and she spoke a few minutes to each of us. She asked me if I'd written any more plays and I said, "No, but I've written a poem about the little white tree." I was sorry I'd spoken of it a minute after, because she said, "Well, enfant, you must say it for us to-night." She forgot about having me do it, and I was so glad.

Dinner was served upstairs, but Madame said we could come down and dance in the ballroom afterward if we wished to. She said she thought we could hear the piano from the room at the top of the stairs if the door was open. Then we all went upstairs to dinner. It was served in a large room off the one where I first met Phillippe, and when we went into

the room, young Madame was standing there by the big fireplace. She wore white and had a long lavender shawl around her and there was a little wreath of amethysts in her hair. She talked to me a few minutes as we were waiting for dinner. "Mehitable," she said, "will you do something for me? You told me that time when you were in the tree the first time I saw you," she smiled at me when she said this, "that you had written a poem about the lights of Paris. Will you let me see it and any others that you've written?" Oh, I was so happy when she said that. All of a sudden I felt—Oh, I don't know—I felt as though I could really write, as though I wanted to go on and on trying to anyway. Of course, I told her that I would, and I guess she knew how happy she had made me.

Then we all went in to dinner. I sat between Una and Tip and we had great fun. Such a very splendid dinner, turkey with mashed chestnuts and first of all a wonderful sort of patty filled with mushrooms and other good things. We had ice cream and funny little pies for dessert, but the pies weren't at all like ours at home, they were rather like pastry cookies with raisins in them. Everyone had a "cracker," as Una called them. We opened them and inside were paper caps. Mine was blue and Una's was green, which, as she is Irish, was just the thing. Tip had such a funny one that looked like a rooster's head, and she crowed so loud once that I'm sure Madame must have heard her though she didn't say a word.

After dinner we all sang songs for awhile, around the big piano. Young Madame played for us and we sang anything we liked. It was great fun. Clythie has a beautiful voice and young Madame told her so. Oh, but Clythie was pleased. She blushed like everything. When the others were dancing, Philippe asked me if I didn't want to walk through some of the

rooms. He doesn't like to dance and as we walked along he told me he liked girls, but not quite so many all at once. He said he had something he wanted to tell me.

All the rooms were brightly lighted, but they looked very old, sort of ghostlike just the same, as we wandered through them. Phillippe looked so much happier than when I'd last seen him. This is what he wanted to tell me. It was about his father and it was very confidential, but I know you'll keep it all a secret, diary. There isn't very much to tell because Phillippe didn't know a great deal about it all himself. His father is a soldier and he let people think that he had done something wrong, in order to shield a very dear friend. I don't know what the wrong thing was, but anyway it was a very sad and dreadful time for them all, for a great many people believed it and it was a disgrace. Of course, Madame, his mother, his wife and some close friends never believed him guilty for a minute, but the world did believe it.

Madame took great care, Phillippe told me, when he was with her in Paris, not to let him go about alone, or to be where he could hear gossip. It was not until the whole matter had been cleared up that he really knew very much about it. Finally the friend grew very ill and confessed that he was guilty, before he died, and now, of course, everyone knows the truth and they are all happy again. I think Phillippe's father must be a wonderful man. Oh, how dear "mother" must have suffered. How glad, how glad I am that she is happy again.

Phillippe showed me the picture of Rose Mathilde. She is not as pretty in the picture as I thought she would be. How I'd like to see one of funny little brave Mademoiselle Toto.

Just before we went back to the school part that night, Phillippe's mother drew me over by the fireplace and put a package, quite a heavy one, into my hands. "From Phillippe

and me," she said as she kissed me goodnight. I was so excited I could hardly wait to see what it could be. Una and I opened it together. She was so sweet and dear about it, not a bit cross that it wasn't for her too. I don't think I could have been so lovely about it. The present was a set of small books of poems, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, and Wordsworth. They were bound in white leather and edged with gilt. Una and I admired them so long, reading bits from them as we sat together on my bed that we had not thought of undressing when Mademoiselle Gelére came to put out the lights. She was not a bit cross, but went away and gave us ten minutes longer. Everyone was sort of Christmassy that night.

School begins Wednesday. Oh, dear, but the holidays have been such happy ones!

CHAPTER XVIII

HANSEL AND GRETEL

Phillippe went south to the Riviera with his tutor in January. He seemed very eager to go, and talked a great deal about swimming and water polo. "I shall live in the sea, except when I'm having lessons with Briggs," he confided to Mehitable before he went.

The midwinter tests came late in January and sleet and wind held sway. Everyone at the Chateau longed for spring. The first week in February there was a heavy snow storm and the garden was a thing of beauty. "Oh for some winter fun," sighed Tip, at tea one snowy day, spreading some treacle on a thick slice of bread and butter.

"It would make us all feel so much better if we could coast down hill a few times on my sled, Whirlwind," said Mehitable. "Now for a Cherryville story," cried Una. "Tell about Cherryville, Mehitable, please."

"I was only thinking of our fun Saturday afternoons, coasting down Bailey's hill. The sun on the snow! Oh, but darkness came so soon."

"Do you think spring is ever really coming again, Una?" asked Mehitable a few days later, as they stood watching the sleet melt into the gray earth of the garden.

"It will surely come in Ireland, it never really leaves Ireland. Oh, Mehitable, don't you think something will happen so that you can go to Garth Hall for the Spring Holidays?" Mehitable shook her head, smiling wistfully. "Let's pretend that I'm going, anyway," she answered.

That same evening Mehitable spent in the old wing with young Madame. Una had been invited also, but it was the evening for her swimming lesson, so Mehitable went alone. They roasted chestnuts over the fire in the little sitting room with the faded red hangings where Mehitable had first seen Phillippe. He had sent the chestnuts, a great bag of them "To the Author of 'Lost Noreen' and all the Cast." While they toasted them, his mother told Mehitable about the blue and gold days in the Riviera, the opal-tinted sea and the splendid drives along the beach. She told about her childhood home in England, of heather moors, of riding fast against the wind across the scented downs.

"I would rather see a moor than almost anything," Mehitable exclaimed.

"You surely shall some day, Little Tree Girl, you shall see our moor, Phil's and mine. We will all three have such happy times in England." She grew serious suddenly and looked at Mehitable for a few minutes in silence, then said gently, "Mehitable, I want to talk to you of something very serious." Mehitable looked up from the chestnuts she was trying to balance on the edge of the fire shovel so that they could have just the right glow from the coals.

"Oh Madame de Villiers, what is it?" she exclaimed. She came and sat on a stool at Madame's feet and looked up at her a little anxiously. Young Madame smiled at her reassuringly. "It's not really serious. It's a very wonderful thing. Only you must see it for yourself."

"See it for myself," Mehitable repeated. Then, turning, she smiled up at her friend entreatingly. "Oh, tell me please."

"It is about your future, Mehitable," the other answered. "It is about your writing." She paused a moment, looking earnestly at Mehitable. "You have a great gift. I have felt

it since you first showed me the little lyric that you wrote about the lights of Paris. All the things that you have shown me are full of beauty. You are a song maker, do you realize that? You can help to make songs for the world."

Mehitable's eyes widened with excitement. She could only look up into the other's face with an almost bewildered incredulous gaze. Could it be true? Oh, she had wondered herself if it could be, but to have it put into words!

"Do you think so—do you believe I—I have that gift?" she asked at last.

"I have just told you that I do. I am asking you now what you are going to do about it."

"To do about it," Mehitable repeated, still gazing up at her friend. "Why I don't know," she said softly, "I hadn't thought. I suppose I'll have to be a teacher. That's what Aunt Comfort expects. I don't want to be one, but I must earn my living, that's why I'm here."

Tears came suddenly to Mehitable's eyes and she turned her head away and looked into the fire. Would this wonderful new friend understand? Could she realize at all how different the life in Cherryville was—how differently Aunt Comfort and those that made up her life at home would feel about things?

Madame did understand, for she said softly after a moment: "There is plenty of time, isn't there, to make plans for your future. Things will work out right for you, I am sure of that. It is only because I care so much, because I am so interested that I speak of it to you. I want you to realize yourself that you have the gift and that it is a very precious one. After all you are only a child," she said, "and you will be learning all the time, reading and living, most of all loving."

Mehitable's eyes glowed. She felt a sort of singing at her

heart, as she would have called it. She bent over the chestnuts, her cheeks flushed pink from the heat of the fire and the glad excitement that she felt. Oh, the happiness, that Phillippe's mother believed in her, believed that she could be a "maker of songs." How beautiful that sounded!

The next day, Mehitable, in a very confidential moment, told Una what young Madame had said about her being a maker of songs. She could not have told anyone else, but Una would understand. They were walking together on one of their first promenades since the bad weather. The snow had melted and though it was only early February, there was a hint of spring in the air. It was only a brief hint, they all felt that, and so longed to make the most of it.

"Mehitable," said Una solemnly, "some day you'll be famous, I feel it in my bones. You'll be the famous Mehitable Webster and I shall say, 'Oh, yes, she is my great friend, we were at school together!' "

They both laughed at this and hurried a little to catch up with the others. Mademoiselle Du Bois, a young governess, who was much less strict than most, was their chaperone that day and did not call to them to keep up as the others would have been sure to do. They were soon deep in conversation again. Ahead of them, Tip's crimson tam-o'shanter bobbed up and down, and now and then her laugh rang out through the wood, for they were walking in the Bois.

"It was wonderful to hear her say it, it made it seem so real," Mehitable was saying as they walked slowly along the brown pathway. "I can't see what the future will be at all. Why I've always expected to teach school in Cherryville. Do you suppose that I could do something else?"

Una laughed and then suggested eagerly. "You and I

might have a flat in London together. Some cousins of mine did that once and they had the greatest fun. You could write and I—oh, I'd ride in the park and work among the poor."

Mehitable laughed at Una's choice of occupations and then stopped suddenly. "Why where in the world are we?"

They both stood in the path and then looked at each other in surprise. Then they called out. There was no answer; just the beat of hoofs nearby on the riding path. The girls and Mademoiselle Du Bois were nowhere in sight. They had evidently turned down a side path, one of the many cross turnings that wind through the Bois. Una called again, very loudly this time, but again there was only the echo of her own voice. The two girls gazed at each other in alarm and then Una threw back her head and laughed.

"Oh, Mehitable, you are always wanting adventures. Now you're really having one. You and I are lost in the Bois, do you realize what that means? The Bois is a very large place and a very strange place." She began to dance lightly along the path, looking back over her shoulder and smiling mischieviously at Mehitable.

Of course, someone of the other little groups of girls with a governess might come along. They waited about, for a few minutes and then as no one came, they walked on a little uncertainly, not knowing which way to turn. As a matter of fact, Mademoiselle Du Bois had brought them farther than they generally came. One of the girls had persuaded her to take a new path and that was the reason that they were puzzled to find the way out.

It had seemed very funny, quite an adventure at first. It still was an adventure, but it was one that boded trouble in the end. It was Una who more than Mehitable realized the

gravity of the situation. Madame's horror—Madame's temper.

"It will be pretty serious for us when we reach the Chateau, but we might as well have as much fun out of it as we can on our way there," she said to Mehitable as they walked along what seemed a very deserted path indeed.

"I'm sure we should have gone the other way, Una," Mehitable answered. "Why this doesn't seem like any path we've ever taken before."

"It isn't, I should think it's off the main road. We must manage somehow to find that and then we'll be all right," murmured Una reflectively. "We're Hansel and Gretel lost in the wood."

"Una—listen, I can almost hear the cuckoo song!" Mehitable said, as they stood uncertainly in the middle of the path. A moment later Una gave a cry. "See, Mehitable, if we're Hansel and Gretel there's the witch's house."

She waved her hand in the direction of a little brown house hardly more than a hut, that showed through the bare trees quite near them. Mehitable peered through the branches.

"What an odd little house, and so like the little hut in Hansel and Gretel. We might inquire the way there," Una said, daringly. Mehitable nodded.

"Oh, could we? What fun!" she exclaimed, and so together they went up the little winding gravel path that led from the wider one where they had been walking.

They waited for several minutes after Una knocked, and not without some excitement. This was a great adventure for two chateau girls, and then the odd little house was so like the wee one in the opera.

They heard slow steps coming toward the door and Una

whispered, "We'll see the frilled cap of the witch in a minute."

The door opened and someone looked out at them through a pair of very large horn spectacles. An old woman who, as Mehitable said, afterwards, might easily have been taken for a witch if it hadn't been for her smile, which was very unwitch-like. "Tiens," she muttered. "What is this—what is this?"

Una, who spoke French more fluently than Mehitable, answered that they were school girls out for a walk; that they had become separated from the rest of their party and wanted to know how to find their way to the nearest entrance.

The funny old woman listened with her head on one side and pointed in the opposite direction from that from which the girls had come. "You had better go that way. It will bring you out near the upper end of the Avenue du Bois."

"So far from the Porte Maillot and from the Chateau!" exclaimed Una.

"Come in, come, for a little minute and you shall have a cake each of you."

The old woman had turned away, but said, looking back over her shoulder, "My cakes are very good. In summer many come here to eat them and sit at little tables that I put outside."

"Cakes! Just like the witch! Isn't it fun," whispered Mehitable, as they followed her into a room at the end of the little hallway.

It was a small room and along one whole side was a cook stove, on the other side a long table. At the little window there was a frilled curtain, white ships on a blue gingham background.

The little old woman did not wear a frilled cap like the witch in Hansel and Gretel, but she had funny little white side curls and very black eyes. There was a tray of small brown tempting looking cakes on the table and she told the girls to help them-

serves. She had asked them to have the cakes because of the very engaging way that Una had spoken to her and because of Mehitable's smile. Also, "They might come back and bring their friends for tea in the summer," she thought, for old Madame Parté had an eye to business as well as a kind heart.

"I do not, as a rule, make these cakes in winter," she explained, as they nibbled delightedly at the toothsome dainties. "It is only when I have a special order from a patron in Paris that I bake at this time of the year, but my son is coming to pay me a visit to-day, and I made these especially for him. There are plenty. Take what you will and welcome. I, too, was a school girl once myself."

"Do you live here all winter?" asked Mehitable, interestedly, finishing her last bit of cake. As their hostess had begged them to take more, she put a second one in her pocket for Tip, and Una saved hers for Clythie and Jean. Una stopped to pat a large maltese cat that came toward her from the cushion by the stove.

"Yes, all winter," the woman answered Mehitable. "But it is in the spring and summer that I am busy. Then I set my little tables out in front and many people come to drink my chocolate and eat my cakes. I am near the riding path and the motor drive is not far away, so the gay parties of friends come here for a cake."

The girls could have listened a long time to Madame Parté, whom they found very interesting, but time was flying and it came over them suddenly that they were lost and that the next thing for them to do was to find their way back to the Chateau as soon as possible. As a matter of fact they had been in the cottage only a few minutes, but they knew that they must not stay longer and thanked their odd hostess very earnestly for her kindness, promising to come again if possible. They

each shook hands with Madame Parté at her door and followed her directions as to reaching the nearest entrance, retracing their steps and finding themselves at last nearing the riding path which they crossed, keeping to their left until at last the entrance came in sight and they passed out onto the Boulevarde.

For a moment they stood there in silence, a little dazed, for they had come from the dim shadowy stillness of the wood directly out into the brilliance of the Bois de Bologne. They were alone in Paris. The excitement, the thrill of it—alone in Paris!

"We must find a telephone booth and let Madame know that we are all right," said Mehitable, beginning to feel that this part of the adventure was not very pleasant. They were both of them very much in awe of Madame, and, as Una said, "Nothing like this has ever happened to a Chateau girl before."

It was a great adventure of course, and some day they would thoroughly enjoy talking it over, telling the others about the weird little house in the wood and the kind little old woman who looked a little like a witch, but just now the immediate present loomed before them.

As they stood there for a moment, a little uncertainly, Mehitable could not help thinking how splendid it would be to tell about in Cherryville. Crowds pushed past them, motors flashed by, somewhere off the avenue a band was playing, the sun shone and there was the faint thought of spring in the air. A gendarme stood near them and Una suggested that they go up and ask him the way to the nearest telephone booth. As she was speaking, Mehitable clutched her arm.

"Why," she breathed, "It's——it's Miss Meadows!" A taxi had stopped at their corner because of traffic ahead and

there sitting alone in it was Miss Meadows. She recognized Mehitable almost at the same moment and cried out in surprise, "Why Mehitable, Mehitable Webster."

They came up to the side of the taxi and then jumped in beside Miss Meadows. She was so surprised at first that she could only repeat over and over, "Why, Mehitable, where did you come from?" They explained their situation and as the taxi started slowly along the Boulevarde, Miss Meadows listened to their account of being lost, of the old woman and the cakes, of Madame's probable anguish at their not arriving with the others. There was a twinkle in Miss Meadows' eyes as she listened. She herself had only arrived that morning and had come out for a little air and to see some of the old Paris sights before lunch. She was just as practical and cheerful as ever and Mehitable felt a great load off her mind. Miss Meadows would know what to do.

They stopped at a hotel and Miss Meadows went in and phoned to Madame. She was gone for several minutes and when she returned there was still a twinkle in her eyes. Yes, she had talked with Madame; they were to come home at once; she had promised to bring them in the taxi. Yes, Madame had worried. "I did the best I could for you, children," she went on smiling at them as they drove toward the Porte Maillot. "After all, there is no harm done, you didn't really mean to cause them all this trouble." She patted Mehitable's knee as she spoke and looked with interest at Una.

"It is good to see my traveling companion again, and what good times we shall have, now that I have come. You remember how we talked of going to Rumplemeyers' that day on the English train? Oh, we'll have some splendid times together and your friend must come with you."

Mehitable and Una both smiled at this, but rather faintly. They felt that the chance of their having any gay outings with Miss Meadows was very small indeed.

"I'm afraid that Madame will never let us," Mehitable answered. "We'd so love to, but—well—after to-day and all, she would hardly let us go. I've looked forward to it so long," she added a little forlornly.

Una cried, "Oh, Madame must let us go with you Miss Meadows. It's real splendid of you to ask me too—but, you don't know Madame. I don't believe that there is a mortal on earth who could persuade her to do something she didn't wish to."

Miss Meadows refused to take such a forlorn view of things and for the rest of the ride, told the girls of her travels in Italy, of much that she had been doing since she bade Mehitable goodbye on the Calais boat. Quite soon they reached the Chateau gate, which was opened for them by old José. Martha, the very severe parlor maid, opened the front door. How odd it seemed to come in that way. After a few minutes they heard the rustle of Madame's gown and she came into the room. She greeted Miss Meadows cordially and listened to the cheery account of her meeting with them. Oh, how innocent and unimportant it all sounded when Miss Meadows told about it. If only Madame would see it that way.

When Miss Meadows finished, Madame turned and looked at them and their hearts sank, for the look was very stern. "And you, Mesdemoiselles, what have you to say for yourselves? What possible excuse have you for such conduct?" They had none. What could they say? What they did say was that they had been so engrossed in talking together that they had let the others slip away from them without their noticing it. They had been unable to find the right path and had asked the way at a little house in the wood. They did not

mention having gone inside and eating the cakes; and, fortunately, the possibility of their having done so did not enter Madame's head, so she did not ask questions about it.

Madame went on talking quite calmly and politely with Miss Meadows and said nothing more to the girls who sat quietly listening, as Madame had not dismissed them. It was Miss Meadows who managed the situation, the girls never knew just how. Perhaps it was her direct American way of expressing things, her cordial interest in the school, her appreciation of Mehitable as a traveling companion. At any rate there was no doubt that Madame began to soften, and when the bell for luncheon rang she told them quite kindly, to go to make ready for lunch. In the next breath she asked Miss Meadows to remain for that meal and together they went up to Madame's own apartments.

"Why, Madame didn't seem as angry as I'd expected," said Mehitable to Una, as they partook of hashed mutton and carrots.

Una nodded. "I think it's because of several reasons. Mehitable. You see she's so annoyed with Mademoiselle Du Bois that she hasn't very much crossness left over for us."

"With Mademoiselle Du Bois? What do you mean?" asked Mehitable.

"Madame doesn't like her, I'm sure of that. Mademoiselle Du Bois is very easy you know, she should never have let us go so far into the Bois. None of the other governesses would have allowed it. Do you know, Mehitable," Una added, "I think Miss Meadows helped a good deal, don't you remember what she said about your being such a splendid traveling companion and how dependable you were?"

"I wonder if Madame will let us go to Paris with her," said Mehitable excitedly.

She was soon to know, for before Miss Meadows left, having

had lunch with Madame and visited the schoolrooms, she saw Mehitable again and told her the happy news that Madame had promised to allow her to go into Paris for the whole day on Saturday. Una perhaps could come also another time, but on Saturday Mehitable was to come alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WHITE DRESS

It rained hard Saturday morning and Mehitable looked rather dubiously at her big cotton umbrella with the greenish horn handle. If only she had a small dark silk one with a plain silver handle and "M. W." engraved upon it. This did not trouble her for long and it was a very smiling, happy girl that jumped into the taxi beside Miss Meadows. What a good time they had talking on their way into Paris. There was so much for the two traveling companions to say, so many questions for Miss Meadows to ask. How strange it seemed to Mehitable. When she had been with Miss Meadows before, she had known nothing of the Chateau, had never seen Una or Nancy or Tip, never wandered through the old wing or met Phillippe and his mother. So much had happened since she said goodbye to Miss Meadows on the wind-swept deck of the Calais boat.

They had lunch at an odd little restaurant just off the Place de l'Opera. It was a favorite haunt of Miss Meadows. She spoke cordially to the fat little woman who waited on them, whom she had known three years before when she had been in Paris. How Mehitable enjoyed it! This was really Paris. She was lunching in a very real French café and was eating a French omelet and some of the long French bread that she had always wanted to taste. During the meal Miss Meadows asked questions about the Chateau life, but Mehitable felt someway that it was a little difficult to make Miss Meadows see just how very interesting it all was.

Miss Meadows stood for the world, the big world outside

the Chateau. She was brisk and quick and practical. After they finished their omelet and salad Mehitable found that if she wished she could have some American ice cream soda and so ordered it at once. Miss Meadows had some raisin pudding for which the café was noted and then they bade goodbye to the smiling little proprietress and stepped out into the cold damp air. Mehitable had wondered what they would do next and if Miss Meadows should ask her what she would like to do, what she would choose. Miss Meadows, however, seemed to know very decidedly what she wished to do, for a while at least.

"Mehitable," she said, "I want to take you now to buy your Christmas presents."

"My what?" asked Mehitable in astonishment.

Miss Meadows smiled as she hailed a bus and they drove on slowly, sitting side by side in a corner of the bus. It was quite crowded and Mehitable enjoyed watching the people. This was seeing Paris in a new way.

"Yes, dear," Miss Meadows was saying, "I so wanted to send you something, but was in Florence ill with influenza and so could only manage to send the card. Mrs. Lindsay also wrote me to see that you had a Christmas present from her when I came to Paris."

Mehitable was silent from sheer amazement. She had never dreamed of this, Christmas presents in February.

They drove to the Bon Marché and Mehitable was a little dazed by the big shop, its shimmer of satins and silks, its polite smiling attendants. They went to the costume department and as they waited for a young woman in black with very light hair to attend them, Miss Meadows said to Mehitable, "Mrs. Lindsay wants her present to you to be a dress, a

very pretty one for your very best. You must choose it yourself so as to have exactly what you most want."

Mehitable could hardly believe her ears. She looked at Miss Meadows in astonishment. "Really pick out my own dress, a new best one?" she asked.

Miss Meadows nodded, "Certainly."

"What would Aunt Comfort say!" Mehitable could not help but speak this thought out loud.

"I don't think she could possibly object to your having Christmas presents, even if they are a little late in the season," answered Miss Meadows. "Mrs. Lindsay is very much interested in you and wants you to have some of the pretty things she is so fond of herself."

"I would rather have a white dress than anything," said Mehitable, and soon they were looking at some very dainty costumes. Mehitable knew almost at once the one she wanted most. She tried it on, standing before a long mirror and it fitted exactly, except that it was too long. She had to stand for a little while so that the interested young girl who had been summoned to shorten it, could pin it all around the hem.

"It's the prettiest one of all, Mehitable. You have splendid judgment," exclaimed Miss Meadows. "It is so very simple," she added. "It suits you perfectly."

Mehitable's eyes were shining and her cheeks grew even pinker with delight when Miss Meadows said in her decided way, "You must have a sash to go with it. What color would you like?"

Mehitable looked up earnestly at her friend. "Oh, Miss Meadows, green please—very pale green," she said.

Some sashes were sent for and Mehitable chose the palest green of all, a soft leaf green. They tied it in shimmering

folds about her waist and the tall attendant in black exclaimed, *"Mademoiselle est très jolie,"* raising her hands in approval.

The dress was to be sent out to the chateau in a day or so. They chose some dainty white petticoats to wear with it, and then went to the shoe department, where Mehitable was fitted to a pair of patent leather pumps; then to the stocking counter, where Miss Meadows purshased some black silk stockings to go with the pumps. When Mehitable protested, Miss Meadows explained.

"You see, Mehitable, you must have everything to harmonize. It is all a part of Mrs. Lindsay's present to you. If you are to have the white dress, you must have the pretty things that go with it. Mrs. Lindsay wants you to have a new spring suit, a hat or two, and some thin dresses for summer."

Mehitable shook her head, smiling up bravely at Miss Meadows. They had come out into the sharp bright air and were on their way to Rumplemeyer's for tea. "Just what you said we would do," Mehitable had remarked with a smile of pleasure when Miss Meadows suggested it.

They hailed a taxi and it was not until they were cozily seated at a little table in a corner of the great crowded room that they went on with their conversation about the clothes. They were waiting for their order to be served and Mehitable was enjoying every minute, watching the many groups of people, men and women who seemed to have nothing to do but laugh and enjoy themselves. Most of all she was interested in some children who sat at a table near them. Such pretty beautifully dressed children with very dark eyes. A boy and two little girls who wore velvet dresses and plumed hats, and had black curls falling about their shoulders. They were all very serious about what cakes they should choose, and were not inclined to take the suggestions of their mother and

the *bonne* who were with them. A large plate of cakes had been set before them and both Miss Meadows and Mehitable smiled to see their solemn faces as they chose their favorites.

It was Mehitable who brought up the subject again of the spring clothes. She had been worrying about it since Miss Meadows had mentioned it. "I haven't told you how happy I am about the white dress, Miss Meadows. I—I don't know how to thank you and Mrs. Lindsay," she said as they sat waiting for their tea.

Miss Meadows smiled at her in her cheery way. "You chose exactly the right dress, dear. I'm delighted with it. In a few days we must do some more spring shopping."

A maid appeared bringing in their tea and far a while they were busy choosing their cakes from the big plate in front of them, and seeing that their tea was just the way they liked it. Then Mehitable looked up at Miss Meadows a little timidly for she hated to seem ungrateful.

"You see," she said, "it's different about the white dress. It's a sort of dream dress. But Aunt Comfort is so far away and she trusts me. She doesn't want Mrs. Lindsay to give me my clothes. Oh, I would so love to have the pretty things, but Aunt Comfort is so far away and she trusts me," she repeated.

"I see," said Miss Meadows gently in a voice Mehitable had never heard her use.

"Aunt Comfort is sending me a spring suit. Miss Prince, our dressmaker at home, is making it. Auntie told me to expect a package early in April." Mehitable smiled at Miss Meadows and then looked down suddenly at her plate to hide the sudden tears that came to her eyes. It would have been so enchanting to go spring shopping with Miss Meadows to buy dainty clothes such as the other girls wore.

They had a delightful tea and laughed together over their

basket tea in the train traveling through England. Mehitable told Miss Meadows of Una's invitation to go home with her for the spring holidays. "It's only fun, our planning it, for of course I couldn't go."

Miss Meadows did not reply, she only smiled a little mysteriously as she glanced at the bill which the maid handed her and counted out the money.

"I want you to know Nancy next to Una," she said.

Miss Meadows' hotel was within a few blocks of the shop and they enjoyed the walk down the rue de Rivoli. Although it was only late in February, the flower stands at the corners bloomed with violets and roses, from the Riviera. It seemed as though Miss Meadows spoke of one unexpected thing after another, for as they turned down the quaint, quiet, homey sort of street where was Miss Meadows' hotel, she said:

"I hear, Mehitable, that you have written a play which was acted at the school. Why did you not tell me about it? she said, grasping Mehitable's arm firmly, as was her habit when they walked along together.

Mehitable looked up at her. Who could have told her? Oh, Madame of course. She blushed a little as she answered. "I was going to tell you, but we had so many other things to talk about," she said simply. She had not felt that Miss Meadows would be interested in the play, she seemed so practical. But she was mistaken, for Miss Meadows was interested. As they were going up in the lift of the hotel, she patted Mehitable's shoulder. "I never dreamed that I traveled all the way from America with a real poet and writer," she said.

Mehitable laughed. Miss Meadows was joking of course, but how kind she was, how jolly!

The windows of Miss Meadows' room looked down onto

the quiet little rue Carré. Mehitable stood looking out far off to where the Seine wound itself like a streak of gray ribbon through the city. Lights had sprung up everywhere, and a few faint stars shone in the early twilight.

"Madame said you must surely be back for dinner. She was very positive about it so we must start very soon," announced Miss Meadows as she bent over a trunk near her bed. She put several packages out on the bed, and Mehitable came and stood near her.

"Do you want to open them now, or wait until you're back at school?" asked Miss Meadows with a twinkle in her eye.

"Open them?" exclaimed Mehitable. "Are—are they all for me?"

Miss Meadows nodded.

"Oh, I'd rather open them now. Why, I couldn't wait," said Mehitable excitedly.

She lifted one of them and felt of it. "This is like Christmas and birthdays and everything all together," she said.

She undid the paper and gave a little cry of pleasure as she held up a soft garment of blue silk, a very faint gray blue, with butterflies of a deeper blue embroidered on it. It was a kimona, a very simple, dainty one, and there were little blue felt slippers to go with it. Mehitable looked up at her friend with a radiant face.

"A beautiful kimona and the darling slippers—Oh!"

"Well," remarked Miss Meadows in her practical way, "when I was a girl at school, I found out that kimonas played a large part in school life. I remember that I had a blue one something like this and it was a great favorite with me. Hurry child, look at the others for we must be off."

The second package proved to be a little leather writing case, and on the cover in gilt letters were stamped the initials

"M. W." "Oh, Miss Meadows, it's like the diary. It's like my dear diary. Oh, I'm so happy. I don't see why you are so good to me."

She gave Miss Meadows a hug as she spoke and then opened the last package. It was a small Brownie Kodak.

"I thought you would like to take pictures of the girls," explained Miss Meadows.

This was the best of all, this last present. "Why I can have pictures now of everything," said Mehitable, wonderingly. "Of the girls of course, and the garden and the Chateau."

Miss Meadows did not give her very much time to think about it then. She phoned for a taxi and they were soon making their slow way toward Neuilly. It was the hour when the crowds were great and the traffic heavy. Mehitable sat back in the taxi and looked out at the brilliant scene, people, motors, lighted shop windows, the gray blue of the sky above and the charm and wonder of Paris all about them. She tried a little shyly to thank Miss Meadows on the way back, but she only laughed in her cheery way and patted Mehitable's shoulder.

"Bless your heart, my dear, I enjoyed choosing the things and wondering what you'd like just as much as you'll enjoy them now that you have them."

They had reached the Chateau gate as Miss Meadows said this and telling the taxi driver to wait, she rang the bell, and as usual faithful José opened the gate door. A few minutes later Mehitable had said goodbye to Miss Meadows with the assurance that she would have another day in Paris soon, and she was back again at school with just time to make ready for dinner.

She had reported to Madame on the way downstairs. She told Gladys about her day in Paris, during dinner, but some-

way it did not sound so very thrilling as she told it. Gladys was so used to cities and fashionable tea rooms. And she could not see why Mehitable was so delighted with her kodak.

"I've had six," she remarked as they sat at dinner. "I broke two or three and lost the others. I never cared much about taking views of places, but when we went to California I thought I ought to have one, and different times when we've come abroad I've carried one along."

Mehitable looked at her in wonder. "But you can think of it all so beautifully if you have the pictures. Of course I would always and always remember the Chateau, but it will be so lovely to have real pictures of it and the girls. Now I can have the faces of my friends with me all the time."

Una was delighted about the kodak, and said laughingly, "You can take pictures of the garden at Garth Hall in the spring holidays, Mehitable."

CHAPTER XX

TEARS AND FUN

There were two long classes after breakfast the next morning. One was grammar which, as a rule, Mehitable disliked, but when Mademoiselle Gerlére said to her that morning, "Mademoiselle Webster you have improved," she was so pleased that even grammar seemed interesting. "How glad Aunt Comfort would have been to have heard her say that," she thought. Somehow she wanted more than ever to please Aunt Comfort.

Next came the class that she loved, the poetry class. They learned to pronounce by memorizing simple poems and reciting them before the class. This morning their poem was the charming one that Victor Hugo wrote about his litttle granddaughter.

"Jeanne était au pain sec dans le cabinet noir,
Pour un crime quelconque."

So it began and each one of them stood up and repeated it. Some of the girls wavered toward the end, and poor Gladys stopped entirely after she had said the first few lines. She could not memorize. It was always the same thing; she would start out bravely enough but was soon in a hopeless tangle. It was difficult to acquire the right accent and it seemed sometimes to Mehitable that she would never be able to speak with the real thrill and charm that Mademoiselle Gelére gave to her words. Mehitable loved the poems and said often to herself as they struggled with the words, "We are spoiling something that is perfect, we are hurting a beautiful thing."

She had said something like this to young Madame one day

and she had answered, "Think what lovely things you will make of the poems when you have finally learned to say them in the right way. Keep on trying, dear."

There was a study hour after lunch and Mehitable wrote out a verb for the next day. No one knew how she disliked verbs. When she had finished she shut up her blank book and put it in her desk, at the same time drawing out her diary. She knew that she should have studied the verb but decided to put it off until the later study period and soon was deep in the delight of writing in her diary.

"I have so much to write in you to-day, diary. Oh, Barbie, we never thought on that birthday morning, that I should have so many wonderful things to say to you. Yesterday was oh, so beautiful! Everything we did was fun, but of course, I keep thinking most about the white dress and the green sash —all my own. Diary, it's a soft, soft white dress and a sash of just the color I've always wanted. It was a dream come true. I loved the whole day so much. This is a happy world."

"Mademoiselle Webster, where is the history exercise that you were to have handed in last night?"

Mehitable looked up with a start. Miss Derk was standing by her desk. Oh—the exercise, she had nearly finished it but had quite forgotten it when she had come in, the night before.

"I was in Paris yesterday, Miss Derk. The exercise is nearly done. I should have finished it last night, but I forgot all about it."

Miss Derk was very much annoyed. She was disappointed also for Mehitable seemed more interested than most of her pupils and as a rule was prompt with her work. "You have no right to forget you school work—what is that?" she asked, picking up Mehitable's diary, as she spoke.

"It is my diary," answered Mehitable in a low voice.

"You have been exceedingly disobedient. You know very well that you are not allowed to write English during study hours. To punish you I shall take this from you," Miss Derk said coldly.

Mehitable felt the blood rushing to her cheeks. She was angry, more angry that she had ever been in her life before, but it was an anger born of sorrow. If she had shown Miss Derk more of the sorrow and less temper, things might have been quite different, but she burst out almost before she knew it with a torrent of angry words.

"Give me my diary, Miss Derk, please give it to me at once. You have no right to touch it. Oh—you are a cruel woman."

A voice broke in on Mehitable's words, a very quiet, stern voice. "Mehitable," it said, "I am ashamed of you."

Mehitable looked up and saw young Madame de Villiers standing by the desk. The bell had rung when Miss Derk had been speaking to her about the diary, and young Madame had come through the schoolroom, on her way to the garden. She said nothing more and passing the desk, went out through the open French window. Mehitable's face had turned a little white. Perhaps Miss Derk noticed this; at any rate she turned away, saying, "Have the exercise ready for me as soon as possible."

She went on down the schoolroom to her own classroom at the far end, and in her hands she carried the beloved diary.

The bell rang and the next study period began. Mehitable finished the exercise for Miss Derk, and then for the rest of the hour sat very still bending over the history book on her desk, and as her hair partly hid her face, one would have thought she was studying. The words of young Madame kept

sounding in her ears. "Mehitable I am ashamed of you." Nothing else seemed to matter just then, not even the loss of the diary. Her most wonderful friend was ashamed of her.

The hour was over at last and Mehitable stood up. There was something she must do at once, she must ask Miss Derk's pardon for having spoken to her so rudely. She would have no respect for herself until she had done so. What would Aunt Comfort have thought to have heard her speak in such a way, she wondered. She knocked on the door of the classroom and at Miss Derk's response, went inside. The teacher sat at a desk where she had been correcting papers. Mehitable went up to her and said bravely, "I'm sorry that I spoke to you as I did, Miss Derk. I hope that you will try and forgive me."

"Very well, Mehitable, we will say no more about it. I was indeed surprised that you could have so far forgotten yourself."

She looked down at her papers and Mehitable left the room. She crossed the schoolroom and the veranda and went on through to the long corridor, up the stairs leading to the Long Gallery. It was recreation time and everyone seemed to be in the garden. She thought she heard Una's voice calling her, but she did not want to see Una or anyone else. She wanted to be alone with her unhappiness.

She went into the unused room by the stairs in the Long Gallery, the same room where she had heard Clythie's and Jean's conversation. For a moment she stood looking out of the window as she had done that other day, and she saw young Madame and Miss Derk walking in the garden. Were they talking of her, she wondered dully? Then she went over and sat down on the worn old sofa in the corner, burying her face

in her hands, but not crying. Had there been a happy day yesterday, a day of surprises? Was there any happiness anywhere in the world?

As she sat there Mehitable wanted Patchwork as she had never wanted him before. She longed to hear his gentle purr, to feel the soft comfort of his fur against her cheek. Suddenly the door opened and someone came quickly inside. It was young Madame; she came up to the sofa and sitting down beside Mehitable, put both arms around her. All the misery of the afternoon found expression then, in tears, and with her head buried on the shoulder of her friend, Mehitable sobbed away some of the hurt at her heart. The worst of it was healed when young Madame said tenderly, "I've always wanted a little girl, Mehitable, a dear, brown-haired girl like you, yes, just like you. I've dreamed of her as you've had your dreams, and now she's come true. You are she and because of loving you so much, it hurt me to have you speak as you did to Miss Derk."

For a long time they sat there on the old sofa and the talk they had brought great comfort to Mehitable's heart. Young Madame did most of the talking for Mehitable could not check her tears all at once. Her sobs grew less and less and after a while she was able to say, with a smile through her tears, "I'm not good enough to be your friend; I've a very bad temper—I haven't really forgiven Miss Derk."

"You are the girl I want, Mehitable, even though you do give such a dreadful description of yourself. You will want to forgive Miss Derk when you know a little more about her. She is one of those unfortunate people who cannot seem to show their best selves to the world. Miss Derk has had a sad sort of life, so sad that I hardly like to tell you about it. She lost her father whom she so loved, and for years has sup-

ported her mother and younger sisters. Then she was engaged to a splendid man, and he was drowned in saving a child in the village where they live. Somehow, this has all made her bitter. She has let sorrow do that for her, has let it take all the sweetness out of things."

"Oh, I've been so selfish, just thinking of myself—I am sorry."

When Mehitable said that, her friend took her face between her two hands and laughingly kissed her. "You're not to be sorry about anything more to-day, dear, you're just to be happy." Then she grew more serious and said gently: "You haven't really been as selfish as you think, Mehitable. Miss Derk told me that you had always shown her more consideration than any of the other girls in the class. She, too, is very sorry about this, I think." They walked back to the veranda together, and when young Madame left her she said, "Some day we'll have you with us in England, Mehitable."

Miss Derk did not mention the incident of the diary to Mehitable again but her manner toward her was kinder. The days flew by, full of work. One day Una came to Mehitable in great excitement. It was just before lunch. "We're to have a half holiday, it's Mardi Gras. Oh, Mehitable, it's going to be so wonderful. You and Tip and Clythie and I are to go with young Madame, yes, she told me to tell you. We're to have lunch and then start right off."

What excitement! Una was full of the holiday spirit right away, she had always wanted to be out on Mardi Gras, but had not been allowed. All the school was to go, but to Mehitable the thought of being with young Madame was the greatest delight of all. When they found her waiting for them outside the gate, sitting in her new gray motor, which she herself drove, and when she called gaily to Mehitable to jump up

beside her it really seemed as though there was nothing left to be desired. There was one thing. Mehitable was wishing Phillippe was with them, as they drove down the Boulevard Victor Hugo.

"This is a day when everyone enjoys themselves," said young Madame. "It's the middle of Lent, and it's a very long ago French custom to have just this one day of fun. It is very innocent fun and no one is any the worse for it. We'll see the procession, but first I have an errand in another direction." She smiled as she spoke, looking back over her shoulder at the girls in the other seat. "We're going to pick up Miss Meadows at her hotel. I wrote her that we would. Will one of you please take the little seat?"

Una said she would like to and just then they found themselves in front of the great Gare du Nord, and almost at once, it seemed, a slender figure in gray came running through the crowd, closely followed by Mr. Briggs, his tutor. It was Phillippe! He jumped up on the running board, kissing his mother, shook hands with Mehitable and the others, and said smiling, "I'm all ready for a jolly day."

What a surprise it was! How pleased they were! Phillippe's mother talked a moment to Mr. Briggs, who then disappeared in the crowd and before they started on Phillippe handed her a letter. It had a French Algiers post mark. She asked the others to excuse her while she read it and then said to Philippe, "It's from father. He will soon be starting home. He's with his regiment in Algiers," she added, turning to the girls.

"Splendid!" answered Philippe, "It came for you at the hotel just before we left, so I brought it right along."

Young Madame looked very happy as she drove slowly through the crowded streets. Phillippe sat between her and

Mehitable. He was much sunburned and his nose was freckled but he too was very happy and beamed on all the world as they came nearer and nearer the Mardi Gras crowd. "Oh, but this is jolly," he kept saying to Mehitable, turning back to send some teasing remark to the girls, every now and then. Tip always had an answer for him and there was much laughter and fun. Miss Meadows was waiting for them and sat with Tip and Clythie on the back seat. Suddenly they forgot themselves in watching for the procession. There was music in the distance, the sound of trumpets and shouting, even applause, and then the very first of the Mardi Gras began, for around the corner, mounted on a white pony came Goo Goo, the clown that all Paris loved. He sang as he came, standing up on the pony now and then, and even dancing, as he roared out his ditty. He waved his hand to the little party in Madame de Villiers' car and they all waved back at him. Phillippe had seen him so often that he seemed like an old friend, for every year, whatever other changes there might be, Goo Goo was always at the head of the procession on Mardi Gras.

Mehitable turned and smiled back at Miss Meadows. "Isn't it fun?" she asked.

Miss Meadows nodded, "Another adventure for you to put in your diary," she answered cheerily. Mehitable's face clouded for a moment, but she had no time then to regret the diary, for Goo Goo was passing very close, dancing a special dance for them, and just behind him came a band of—what were they? Pigmies? Odd little figures dressed as Brownies and gnomes. Then there was the band all in red and gold, playing martial music.

"It makes me want to be a soldier more than ever," said Phillippe to his mother.

Then the floats came in sight, and to Mehitable they were

the best of all. One never knew what was coming next, and oh, how clever they were, how merry everyone was, how they sang and shouted, laughed and danced. Girls in Eastern costumes, long white robes and veiled faces, girls dressed as Breton peasants, as Spanish beauties, as flowers, and even as birds.

"See that violet girl, isn't she lovely?" said Clythie eagerly, as a float went by. The violet girl was lovely. She sat in the midst of a group of girls. Her mauve frock was covered with violets, and there was a wreath of them about her dark head.

"She is lovelier than the Queen, I think," answered Mehitable, for just then the Queen and her court drove by, a young girl in white with a crown of brilliants on her head. Grouped around her were other girls in white and pink.

"I should think they would all take their death of cold," remarked practical Miss Meadows.

Just then they were showered with red and green and white confetti, thrown at them by a group of Pierrots in their odd, black and white costumes and tall black caps. Their float was a red one and they made a very pretty picture.

"You should make a poem about the Pierrots, Mehitable," said young Madame.

"Oh, look," cried Tip, "there's the pancake float, what fun —see they are really making them. Oh, I'd love to be up there with them." They laughed at Tip when she said she liked the pancake float best of all.

The procession passed by and Phillippe suggested to his mother that they go somewhere for tea. "This has made us all hungry," he said.

A sudden idea came to Mehitable, and she looked up eagerly. "If we're really going to have tea somewhere, could we

go to the witch's house in the woods where Una and I met the nice funny little woman who makes the very good cakes?"

"Oh, yes—could we? That would be the very best of all," exclaimed Una.

Madame de Villiers laughed and, starting the car, headed it toward the Bois. "You don't deserve to go there, either of you naughty runaways, frightening my poor mother-in-law, as you did.

Mehitable looked at her to see if she were serious, but Madame was smiling and nodded affirmatively. "Yes, it will be fun to go there. I've heard of the place and that the cakes are very good, and on Mardi Gras people are supposed to do as they like whether they deserve it or not."

They were making their way slowly now through the very crowded thoroughfare, but after a time they were really in the Bois and somewhat off the beaten track and before they knew it, they caught a glimpse of the little brown rustic cottage, through the very early spring green of the trees.

Una and Mehitable were greatly excited at coming again to the scene of their adventure. Would the little Madame Parté be ready for visitors, would she have baked her famous little cakes to-day? thought Mehitable as they left the motor in the roadway and came up the winding path. Indeed the little cake woman did expect people, and she greeted them cordially, even patting the two girls on the shoulder. As it was still early there were only a few people at the many little tables at the back of the cottage and they were soon served with cups of hot chocolate and the delicious cakes. They had a very good time. It was warm for March and the fragrant woody scent of the Bois was all around them. Young Madame was very lovely in her gray motor cloak and her hat with the soft, silvery-gray veil. Phillippe had much to tell them of

his sports in the south and the girls told him all the latest Chateau news. Miss Meadows was enjoying it all so much. The day had given her the touch of foreign life which she so liked and she was interested in Mehitable and the other girls and in Phillippe and his mother.

The little cake woman came and talked to them, telling them about her son, and blushing with pleasure as they praised her wares. They said goodbye, promising to come again, and were soon on their way back. They passed a great many little booths where smiling, dark-haired girls sold bunches of violets and mimosa, shiny squares of gingerbread, almond sweets done up in colored tissue papers, and photographs of the floats. Young Madame said that they might buy something if they wished, and they had a splendid time choosing what they would have. Una bought some mimosa; Clythie a bunch of roses; Phillippe several squares of gingerbread which he passed around; Mehitable a picture of some of the floats that were in the parade for Miss Meadows, and a great bunch of lovely fresh violets for young Madame, who was delighted with them and pinned them on the front of her coat.

They brought Miss Meadows back with them to the Chateau for there was to be a concert that evening and Madame had asked her to attend it. Almost the happiest part of the day to Mehitable was the end of it, for she wore the new white dress and the green sash. She with Una, Tip, and some of the others, sat in a row together. Phillippe and his mother and Miss Meadows were with Madame near the stage. Clythie sang a sweet French song call *"'Ouvre tes yeux blue,"* and had much applause. She danced also and was quite the belle of the evening, in her soft rose frock. Janey Dascrow played, and as Mehitable listened she thought of Tip's words that first morning on the walk, "She is a genius."

Several other pupils played and Etta Slowburn, who spoke French with a very correct accent, recited Victor Hugo's *"Les Yeux."* Mehitable had never heard it before and felt the beauty of it although Etta did not give it much expression.

The greatest surprise of the day came after the concert when Madame, who stood with Miss Meadows by the desk, beckoned to Mehitable, and when she had come up to her, looking at her with her direct piercing glance, said—

"Enfante, I've been talking with Miss Meadows about you, discussing with her a letter I have received from Mrs. Lindsay. She has suggested your going somewhere for the spring holidays. Miss Meadows says that Una O'Hara wishes you to go home with her." She glanced sharply about the room, saw Una and called to her.

Mehitable hardly remembered the conversation that followed, but she knew before it was over that a great wish was coming true for Madame said, "If you do well in your work from now until April, I do not see any reason why you should not go."

Una and Mehitable could only look at each other, but they managed to say, "Merci, Madame."

Miss Meadows was obliged to go on to London the next day and so Mehitable had to say goodbye to her. It would be a long goodbye, because Miss Meadows was sailing the next week, from Liverpool. Mehitable felt the tears in her eyes as Miss Meadows kissed her goodbye.

"I shall surely go to see your aunt in Cherryville as soon as I can and will tell them all about you. Have as many adventures as you can and write me about them," Miss Meadows said cheerily, little knowing what one of them would be.

When Mehitable said goodnight to young Madame, the lat-

ter reminded her of what the visit to Ireland would really mean to her. "You will find afterward how much inspiration it will give you for years to come. Ireland will bring your poems to the surface, Mehitable,—all the lovely fancies way back somewhere in your mind."

After Mardi Gras they went back again to humdrum school life but they felt some of the fun and merriment still with them. Mehitable wrote a long letter to Aunt Comfort telling her about the proposed trip to Ireland, another to Barbara and one to the boys, Robin and Johnnie. "If only we four could go with Una instead of just one of us," she wrote. She was to be at the Chateau all the next winter and would be there in the summer, she supposed, until Mrs. Lindsay came from Japan in August. Mrs. Lindsay was a very poor correspondent and Mehitable had heard from her only twice since she had been at school but had written regularly, herself. "We will go off somewhere on the continent and really become acquainted," Mrs. Lindsay had written in her last letter. How thrilling that sounded to Mehitable—"somewhere on the continent."

Time flew by and the last evening before the spring holidays came almost before they knew it. Mehitable and Nancy had a long talk by the window. "It's a queer kind of place, Ireland, I've always heard, and you are liable to pick up all sorts of fancy notions there," said Nancy. "Do be careful, Mehitable."

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE WAY THERE

Mehitable and Una were to travel with the girls going home to England for the holidays. After prayers, the night before they were to leave, Miss Derk handed Mehitable her diary. "You will want it in Ireland," she said kindly. Mehitable impulsively kissed Miss Derk, and she did not seem to mind.

It was really "The Day" at last. Trunks were being taken out by heavy-footed expressmen. Because of this the girls went down the servants' stairway for lunch and then there was the hurried putting on of jackets, a gathering together of bags and umbrellas, and they were off. The familiar omnibusses took them to the Gare du Nord, and soon they were comfortably settled in the train.

Who would have thought that travelling could be so fascinating, so much fun! One's own friends coming right along, too. Mehitable was thinking of this as the train rushed on. Madame's compartment was next to theirs, so that Tip had to be silenced every now and then when her spirits got the better of her. She and Una, Chiona who was to spend her spring vacation at the Japanese embassy in London, Janey Dascrow and Mehitable occupied the same compartment. All the way to Calais they talked and laughed. They were seeing each other in quite a new environment and there was something very interesting about it. "We all seem different, some way," Mehitable said and they all laughed.

Una was in keen spirits. She was going home, and above

all was taking Mehitable with her. So many of their dreams were coming true. Mehitable was divided between a desire to gaze out of the window "at France," as she expressed it and to listen and join in the fun in the compartment. The despised brown valise was with her and she teased Tip by asking if she would carry it for her.

For a while she did forget everything but the wonder outside, for the country in its very early spring dress was lovely beyond words. They were passing a river, a thin streak of silver, and on the opposite side a tall castle stood outlined against the blue sky.

Chiona gazed out of the window with Mehitable, sharing the beauty of the scene with her. They were both compelled to look around when Tip called "Lunch." Thérèse, Madame's maid, was passing baskets around in each of the compartments and they were soon enjoying sandwiches and fruit. Then before they knew it they were in Calais, on the boat starting for England. The crossing to Dover was much less rough than they had expected and as they were allowed to be on deck and the seats were nearly all taken, Mehitable, Una and Tip and two or three others, sat in a life boat and Mehitable made up a story of a shipwreck. It was an absurd story, for the entire crew and all the passengers landed on a wonderful island full of fruit and vegetables and lived there happily ever after.

"Oh, do let them have ship's biscuits and tinned beef, Mehitable; they always do in such stories and it sounds so good," said Una when they were in the midst of the story. Mademoiselle Gelére found them there in the boat and made them leave it at once, but by that time the great white cliffs of Dover were in sight and there was a hustling to make ready to land.

The tea boys put in an appearance on the train just before they left Dover, but Madame would not let them have tea, saying they had had a good lunch and that that was enough. This was a disappointment to Mehitable. She had thought so much of the English tea on the train with Miss Meadows. They said goodbye to Madame and the girls at the great noisy London station. Madame was too busy to do more than give them a last warning as to how they were to conduct themselves on the journey, when they were left alone. She kissed them on each cheek in true French fashion and before they knew it they were safe inside a taxi with Miss Derk and on the way to the small hotel in Russell Square where they were to spend the night. It was raining and so dark that, peer as she would, Mehitable could catch only a glimpse of London. Through a sheet of rain she could see a great dome in the distance which Miss Derk told her was St. Paul's Cathedral.

The hotel was very quiet. The windows of their rooms looked out on a large silent square surrounded by dark silent houses. They had supper in their little sitting room, by a small wood fire. That was fun. "Sort of like a Dickens story," thought Mehitable, who had loved "David Copperfield" for a long time.

For supper they had chops and potatoes and a pudding which Una said was called "Semolina." It was very good but Una did not eat it. "I was brought up on it," she said. "We used to have it for nursery dinner twice a week." Miss Derk admitted that she, too, had been brought up on it. She was quite pleasant, "quite like a girl," said Una to Mehitable afterward.

"Oh, how Mehitable wanted to see London. Here she was in the heart of it and yet she could hardly see out of the windows. Una had suggested to Mehitable that she ask Miss Derk

if they might at least take a little walk before going to bed. "She likes you best, perhaps if you ask she might say yes," Una had suggested. Miss Derk, however, had refused. She said they were all tired. It was raining, and they must make an early start in the morning, so after a while they went to bed and were asleep almost at once.

There was a hurried breakfast next morning and they were soon on the train at Euston station bound for Holyhead, where they were to take the boat for Ireland. Miss Derk went with them as far as Chester, which was more than half way. The three had lunch together on the train and Miss Derk was almost gay; they had never seen her that way before. She was going home for the first time since September, and because she was happy she seemed younger, a different being, to the two girls. They both kissed her goodbye and she did not once tell them how to behave on the rest of the journey. Instead she actually said she wished they were stopping off at her home for a few days, and that she would meet them at Chester on their way back, and then was gone.

Mehitable and Una looked at each other and smiled happily as the train started on and they were alone. "Is it really true —you and I on our way to Ireland? Was there ever an adventure like this?" exclaimed Mehitable.

"What if you shouldn't like Ireland?" asked Una a little anxiously. "Some people don't you know."

Mehitable only smiled at this. The thought of her not liking Ireland seemed too absurd to be worthy of an answer.

There was an odd feeling of freedom in their being alone together. They had the compartment to themselves now and sat looking out at the fast flying landscape. After the guard called "Bangor," Mehitable turned to Una speaking excitedly. "We're in North Wales now, and we're near Gwendy's home;

she said after we left Bangor to watch for Menai Bridge, that we could see the Lodge house of her home from the train."

They saw the bridge almost at once and just across from their window on the left they saw the smoke rising from a little house which they made up their minds was surely belonging to the estate which was Gwendy's home. Soon they were at Holyhead. Their boat lay alongside the platform as the train drew up, and they followed the crowd on board.

The next three hours Mehitable never forgot as long as she lived. It was her first experience at being in a rather small boat in the midst of a tremendous sea. She was too excited to be really ill and from where she lay she could watch the sea. The waves were giant things, menacing, cruel. At last the stewardess came to them where they lay on sofas in the ladies' cabin and told them that they would be in Kingtown almost at once. So they gathered up their bags and umbrellas and went out on deck. The motion had greatly lessened and they were nearly at the end of a pier that stretched far out into the gray water. The sky was blue, gray, and white. Sea gulls floated about the ship.

A mist lay over the gray city of Dublin in the distance. It was sunset time and the clouds in the opal sky were faintly touched with pink and gold. They boarded another train which also lay alongside of the platform when they embarked, and they had a quick little journey to Dublin in a crowded compartment. Mehitable caught a glimpse of green fields and high stone walls and then before she knew it they had changed trains at a Dublin station and were on their way to Killcrae. It was a journey of only an hour, and Una grew more and more excited as they passed familiar places and she realized how soon she would really be home.

At last the train drew up at the little station of Killcrae and they jumped out. The guard handed down their baggage and the train started on. Una was talking to the old station master almost before she was really safe on the platform. She seemed to know him well and asked him at least a half dozen question almost in one breath. Where was everybody? Had he seen anything of the motor that day? Weren't the boys home? How was his wife and the new baby? The station master, a grizzled old man, answered her questions in a roundabout way. He had heard tell that the master had gone fishing. Yes, he had seen Master Pat with the car up Killcorn way early in the day, the new baby was the prettiest in all Ireland.

"Oh well," said Una, unconcernedly, turning to Mehitable, "no one came to meet us. Oh, yes," she exclaimed, "there's old Garry—hullo Garry—I say Garry!" she called, and an answering voice from a strange-looking vehicle coming toward them called out, "Welcome, and miny of them, Miss Una."

The newcomer waved his whip and drew up at the corner of the platform near them. "It's our Garry," explained Una, delightedly. "He's come with the outside car. Leave your bag, he will see to everything."

She leaned over the edge of the platform and warmly shook hands with the odd-looking, white-bearded man who drove the car. He climbed down rather painfully, and as Una introduced him to Mehitable, made a low bow. He wore a faded green coat and wide hat and he had a very bright smile when he spoke.

"Sure it's a great day this, Miss Una, a great day." He made an extra bow to Mehitable. "You're welcome Miss, welcome. There be no one comes to Garth Hall that be not welcome."

"Well, let us hurry home. Come, Mehitable, climb in, I'll help you. See to the luggage, Garry. And now we're off. Oh, the joy of it, I'm home."

Garry chirped to the horse and they started down a long, winding road. They were riding in a jaunting car, a real one. This was Ireland. She was on her way to Una's home, and she would see it all, the wishing well in the wood, the haunted wing, Una's brothers and sisters, everything.

It had cleared since sunset and a few stars shone faintly in the pale sky. On each side of the road were trees faintly green against the sky Far off were purple blue hills. "The sugarloafs," said Una.

They drove back to back, sitting sideways on long narrow seats. Stumpy, the horse, was wanting his late supper and went at a brisk trot. The air was sweet, breathing of clover. Along the roadside were bushes of wild roses. Their sweetness seemed everywhere and they shone faintly pink in the soft dusk. It was lovely beyond words. "Only a poem can describe it," thought Mehitable.

She would have liked just to drink it in in silence, but Una and Garry had much to say, Garry especially. "Your tilligram niver came, dear, till to-night. Mag Shillagor was took awful sick wid pleurisy this marnin, and they was all so wild about bein' afraid she might die. She, with six childrin and Barney no good at doin' anything, and so they forgot entirely to send the tilligram up to the house."

"Is mother home?" asked Una, not at all upset by this news of the wire.

"No, Miss Una, she's gone a fishin' for two days, she and Master. They weren't expectin' ye till to-morrow."

"Who is home?" asked Una.

"All the boys except of course Master Lionel in India, and two frinds from the college of Master Pat's. and your cousins

the McCathy Gormes and some frinds of Miss Molly's and —and why that's all, but—Oh, yis, your old frind Miss Winchy's spending a week bein' run down in health with the rheumatism—she's——"

"All right, Garry. Oh, dear, what on earth did old Winchy want to come just now for? She's a governess we had for years and we all drew a sigh of relief when she finally went to live with her brother. Mother's so soft hearted, she's told her to come back whenever she likes."

It seemed to Mehitable, from Garry's account, that there would be a house full to greet them on their arrival. She was disappointed that Una's mother was not at home and a little alarmed at the thought of meeting so many strangers. As they turned into a driveway guarded by wide open iron gates, Una put her hand on Mehitable's shoulder.

"We'll see Garth Hall in a minute, just when we take the turn ahead," she said.

Stumpy trotted around the winding gravel curve and tall and dark against the sky stood Garth Hall. It was a huge house of red brick, darkened by centuries of storm and faded here and there to orange by centuries of sun. There was a sloping terrace at one side and deep woods at the back. As the horse's hoofs sounded on the driveway, there was a sudden wild commotion, barking, the rush of feet and a cavalcade of dogs came rushing toward them. Una nearly jumped out of the car in her delight.

"Darlings," she called, "Asthore, Midge—Oh, there is Golliwog!"

She stood up in the car in some danger of being thrown out, as they whirled up to the wide stone doorway. The dogs rushed around and around the car barking furiously. Una jumped down, gave a hand to Mehitable and the next second

was receiving the wild caresses of what seemed to Mehitable at the moment, innumerable dogs.

Una petted them all, at the same time calling out to a pretty, brown-haired girl, who was waving to them as she came flying across the lawn.

"It's Molly—hullo Molly—this is Mehitable. Oh, it's jolly to be back. What's the matter with Dodger's fur? It looks queer." she added in the next breath.

"Mange, I'm afraid. Garry overfeeds them," answered Molly, giving Una a hurried kiss. "I'm so glad you've come," she said to Mehitable. "Mother's gone off with Dad,—back to-morrow. The house is crammed and Miles has asked those stupid Fogarty boys for the week end. He is so annoying. They will simply have to sleep in the coach house, for Pat has that nice Reggie Carters staying and I've asked all the O'Laughlans to spend the night after tennis to-morrow."

This conversation took place in one breath and they were still standing, on the wide stone steps, the enchanting evening air all about them.

"I like the Fogarty boys. They're not stupid at all. I'm glad Miles has asked them. They won't mind sleeping in the coach house. Where's Peg?"

"Rat hunting along the south creek," answered Molly, as they went inside.

"We're starved. Had dinner?" asked Una, as she put her arm around Mehitable and drew her inside the great oak door.

"We played until nearly six before Dennis brought out the tea. Everyone was famished and we devoured simply dozens of potato cakes, so we thought instead of dinner we'd have late supper when you came. We didn't know you were coming until an hour or so ago. They didn't send up the wire."

They were standing in the middle of the great hall and it

was so dark that Mehitable could see Molly's face only dimly as she spoke. Just then a man servant put some lighted candles on an oak stand near the door and came toward them with a tall candelabra of lighted candles in his hand. It was Dennis, the butler, and Una greeted him cordially. The dogs had followed them inside and wandered restlessly about. Now that the first wild excitement was over they did not know quite what to do next.

Voices sounded, and the next minute several boys with tennis racquets came in from the back of the hall. It seemed to Mehitable that there were dozens of them. In reality there were eight, and with them were three girls.

"We've been for a long walk since tennis," one of the boys called and then recognizing Una they all came up, and there began a series of introductions. Mehitable had never met so many people at one time before.

Dennis announced supper as she was being introduced to the last McCarthy Gorme cousin and they all went into the big, dimly-lighted dining room. Una and Mehitable washed their hands and smoothed their hair in a cloak room off the hall. It was so filled with golf sticks, bags, fishing rods and hats and coats that they could hardly walk across it. Then they went on in to supper, for they were very hungry indeed.

Everyone was very merry and noisy at supper and there was a great deal of laughter. The dogs sat about at the sides of their favorites. Little Golliwog, the black-haired poodle, honored Mehitable with his company, sitting quietly beside her and taking any morsel that she gave him, in a very polite and quiet manner. Miles and Eric, the two O'Hara boys, home from their first year at Trinity College in Dublin for the spring vacation, were in the greatest spirits. Miles, the younger one, a lad of seventeen, had with him his friend

the Fogartys, who knew Una well, and they were soon deep in plans for the next few days.

"I want Mehitable to see Glendalough and I insist on having the motor almost all the time. I'll speak to dad about it," announced Una to her brother Patrick, as he helped her to some cold tongue.

"I'll be delighted to drive Miss Mehitable anywhere she would like to go," announced Patrick gallantly.

"We won't need you at all. I'll drive the car myself," answered Una. "Miles and the boys can come if they like, we're going to have all sorts of fun, any number of picnics."

Miles and the Fogartys entered into Una's schemes and said if need be that they would fight for the motor until the last man fell. The older ones, Molly, her friend Lina Wallace and the McCarthy Gorme cousins had much to say about a dance the next night, and did not pay very much attention to the younger ones' plans.

"Isn't it too early for picnics?" said someone suddenly from the far end of the long table. It was little Miss Winchy, the former governess.

"Oh, no, Winchy, it's never too early for picnics at Killcrae," answered Una.

Just then a voice sounded from the open window which looked out on the terrace. "It's too early for tennis. Wait until Dad comes home and finds how you've cut up the ground to-day."

The voice was Peg's. She jumped into the room and running over to Una, threw her arms around her neck. Peg's hair was flying. Her gingham frock was torn and there were splashes of mud on her skirt, but Una did not mind this and hugged her little sister with all her might. Molly gave an exclamation of horror.

"Oh, Peg, what a sight you are. What would mother say?"

"This is Mehitable, Peg. You know I've written so much to you about her. She'll tell you all kinds of stories if you're good."

"Will you?" asked Peg, taking Mehitable's hand as they all left the dining room.

Mehitable promised that she would, and held on to Peg's hand, as they went out onto the veranda. She felt more at home with Peg than with any of the others, though they all were extremely kind and friendly.

"We can take a walk if you like," suggested Una. "We can walk a little way through the glen. Not far, for it will be so dark."

Several of the others joined them and they walked around the corner of the house, past the kitchen garden, on and on under blossoming fruit trees, past a great sweep of daffodils to a little wicket gate. The Fogarty boys were with them, and Miles and Molly and her friend. Miss Winchy went a little way through the garden, but was afraid of the wood at night and called all sorts of warnings after them about wet feet, neuralgia and tramps. They only laughed and with Peg to take the lead they all followed after.

CHAPTER XXII

GARTH HALL

It was a delightful walk. The moon shone faintly through the spring leaves, delicately lighting the ferns and wild flowers. As they went on farther into the demesne, it grew so dark because of the denseness of the wood that Molly suggested they turn back. "It gives me the shivers, it's too uncanny," she said.

"The little people will be dancing in the fairy ring by the well. Let's go just a little farther," suggested Peg, holding tight to Mehitable's hand.

"You know better than that, Midget," laughed Miles, as they turned back.

The air was soft and filled with a mystery. What was it? Mehitable was very tired, and she felt somehow that she was walking in a dream, walking in an Irish wood where Peg said the fairies were dancing. They all sang as they walked back. Now and then they would stop to talk over some sudden plan. Once they all sat down on some logs quite near the wicket gate and, in spite of various differences of opinion, they finally decided on a picnic at Glendalough for the day after the one following.

"We'll take you through the Devil's glen, Miss Mehitable," said Miles.

Mehitable smiled at him happily. "And can I see the Devil's Kitchen and St. Kevin's Bed, and all the other places that Una has told me about?" she asked excitedly.

They assured her that she should see all there was to be seen anywhere about their part of the country.

"The Blarney Stone is too far away I'm afraid, for this time," Miles remarked as they went on back through the garden. "But perhaps not," he added with real Irish dislike of limiting anything.

Mehitable and Una had a big, airy room to themselves. "Peg shares it with me as a rule, but she's rooming with Winchy now, so we can be together and talk and talk as much as we wish. Do you think you'll like Garth Hall?" she asked a little anxiously.

"Oh Una!" was all Mehitable could say. "Oh, Una, it's almost all of my dreams come true. I'm so happy—so happy!"

"You've only had a glimpse of it in the moonlight. Isn't it odd to think you've not seen it in the day time yet."

They did no more talking that night for they were so tired that they were asleep before they knew it.

The sun streamed in through the long pink and white ruffled chintz curtains next morning, and woke the two girls out of a very sound sleep. When once awake, however, they were far too excited to stay another minute in bed and were the first ones down for breakfast. The big dining room was flooded with sunshine. It showed up the very worn places in the dull blue rug, and on the oak floor, and the worn leather coverings of the chairs. Peg came dancing in almost as soon as they reached the dining room and the three had a merry breakfast together. To Mehitable it was strange and interesting. She liked to choose what she would have for breakfast from the various dishes on the table. Each dish had a little flame under it to keep it hot. She chose grilled kidneys and hot, buttered griddle cakes, and they had tea and honey and home-made jam.

Before they had finished, Molly and her friend appeared and Mehitable thought Molly quite the prettiest girl she had ever seen. She had blue eyes and dark hair and glorious coloring. She wore a plain blue gingham and some wild roses were fastened at her belt. "We went out for a walk before breakfast," she said, smiling a greeting to Mehitable, as she cut a huge slice of bread from the loaf.

Everyone waited on themselves for breakfast. Molly was a very jolly girl. Her friend had been with her at school in England and they were soon all deep in school talk, for although the two older girls were really "out" they liked to talk over the fun they had had at Cheltenham. The Chateau seemed a queer sort of place to them from Una's and Mehitable's account. They were sure that they would have been dreadfully in awe of Madame, though the thought of being in Paris was rather thrilling to them. They were thinking a great deal about clothes, new frocks and hats for Horse Show Week in Dublin, the next August. "Oh, to be rich and to be able to have all the gay and frivolous clothes one wants," sighed Molly.

The next minute she was entering into the Glendalough plan with all her might. Yes, they would all go. They could have the motor and why couldn't Garry drive the side car and carry the provisions for tea and lunch that way? They went out as soon as they had finished breakfast, looking for Garry, and found him talking leisurely to a stable boy, smoking a long clay pipe, as he held forth on his grandfather's fight with a traveling salesman at the Donnybrook fair some fifty years before. He was delighted at the thought of a picnic and vowed that any horse he drove could reach Glendalough in less than three hours.

What a day that was! How they explored the gardens,

lovely in their first spring blossoming! All up and down the paths they ran, in and out of the shrubbery, through little moss gates in the hedges. They sat in all the five summer houses, one of them being Peg's doll house. Some of the dolls still occupied it and Mehitable enjoyed them as much as anything else. They drove twice to the village with Garry that morning, coming back a different way each time so that Mehitable could have a different view of the hills. They were very late for lunch, but so were the Fogarty boys and Miles, who had been fishing, and were full of accounts of their morning's sport.

After lunch, Una and Mehitable went for a walk, as Una wanted her to see the woods in the day time. "Of course you couldn't tell anything about them last night, Mehitable. Oh, I know you're going to love the woods just as I do!"

They had entered the demesne and suddenly Una stopped speaking. "When we turn the corner by that big beech tree, shut your eyes, Mehitable, and don't open them until I say you may."

Mehitable did so as they turned the corner, and Una said, "Open your eyes."

Again Mehitable obeyed; she gave a little gasp of delight and stood still. Through the green of moss and trees and ferns as far as she could see was a sweep of pale gold and of blue, soft sky blue, deepening to sapphire. No fairyland could be more enchanting than the woods of Garth Hall in primrose and blue bell time. They made a carpet of loveliness as far as one could see.

Mehitable clasped her hands together. "It's fairyland," she breathed.

Just then Peg came running toward them through the green and gold, her curls flying in the breeze, her pink frock making a vivid bit of color.

"I want you to see the fairy ring. Come this way Mehitable," she said. She had gathered a great bunch of wild flowers, wild forget-me-nots and violets, and gave them to Mehitable.

"Oh, Peg," said Mehitable, putting her face against the flowers, lovingly. "Did you really have courage to pick them? Someway they seem enchanted to me. You see I've never been in an Irish wood in the spring before."

Peg laughed delightedly and they followed her down the side path for a long way, deep into the very heart of the wood, on and on until except for patches of sunlight here and there, it was almost dark. Suddenly Peg stopped and looked up at them. "See," she said softly, "there is the fairy ring. Primroses and violets and tiny sprays of fern made a ring, a perfect circle.

"It just grows that way, we didn't make it," said Una, as she leaned over and touched the flowers gently. "I always come to see the fairy ring the very first morning when I'm back from school."

"The fairies dance here at night," said Peg. "That is," she added, "we like to pretend they do. Once when I was only eight, Una and I came here at midnight. No one knew anything about it, of course, it was moonlight and we waited quite a while, but we didn't see any fairies."

Una laughed. "Oh, that was long ago when I was only twelve," she said, rather shamefacedly.

Mehitable was kneeling by the fairy ring. How cool and sweet and dark it was there! This was an Irish wood and she felt such a part of it, so still and happy. She looked up at the two who were watching her delight.

"Perhaps you can make up a poem about it, Mehitable," said Una. "Perhaps I can," she answered softly.

They spent a long afternoon in the wood. There were so

many things to show Mehitable, so many old haunts that Una wanted to revisit right away. Tea was waiting for them under the big copper beech at the side of the terrace, that is the table was spread there, and when Dennis heard their voices, he brought out fresh tea. In fact he seemed to spend most of his time bringing out fresh tea, for people kept appearing. Miles and the Fogartys were late again and a whole outside car full of neighbors came before they had finished. They had hot cakes" which were rather like Desire's soda biscuits, and they all enjoyed the brown bread and butter and the home-made seed cake. The dogs drank saucers of milk and eagerly devoured any dainties that were thrown to them. The shadows were lengthening and the April air was turning very cold before they had all finished tea. Major and Mrs. O'Hara arrived before dinner and that meal was a very much more formal affair than that of the night before.

Mehitable felt a little shy at meeting Una's parents, but they were so kind and jolly and welcomed her so heartily that she felt almost like one of their own family right away. Mrs. O'Hara was a thin, sweet-faced woman whom all her family adored, and the Major, in spite of his gruff voice and seemingly dictatorial ways was the soul of good nature.

Una made her request for the motor the next day, and he promised she should have it. Forbes the chauffeur was ill, so he himself would drive them to Glendalough. Peg was so delighted at this, that she threw her arms around his neck and gave him a hug. Guy and Fergus, who had been on the fishing trip with their parents, were fine-looking lads of thirteen and fifteen. They said that they would come along on their motorcycles, and one of them offered to take Mehitable on the chair attachment, but the Major laughed at the idea.

"I'm responsible for her until she is safe at the Chateau. I

can't risk her life in that infernal machine of yours, Guy," he said.

Mehitable liked Guy. There was something about him that reminded her of Robin.

It rained hard the next two days, so that they had to give up the picnic idea, but they had a splendid time, all of them together. As Molly said, they all forgot that they were growing up, and they played hide and seek all over the great house. They even hid in the haunted wing and that to Mehitable was the most thrilling thing she could imagine. Of course she knew that she wouldn't really see the "very white lady in gray," but still it was so interesting, such fun to pretend that she might see her! She did not say much of this to the others, because they never joked about ghosts, especially about the lady in gray. Una had told her so.

The third day was sunny and quite warm for late April, and they all set off in high spirits. In the big motor were the Major, Mehitable, Una, Peg, Guy, one of the cousins and a friend of Una's, who lived nearby and who was named Sheila. Miles and a Fogarty boy travelled on Guy's motor-cycle. Old Garry had started off almost at dawn with the outside car filled with baskets of provisions for lunch and tea.

Molly and her friend had other plans, but Patrick said he might show up for tea. "We always have tea in the same place at Glendalough," Una said to Mehitable as the motor sped along the smooth sunshiny road. "We have it by the lake that 'Lark has ne'er flown o'er'. Have you read that poem, Mehitable? You'd love it."

Mehitable said she had not, and the Major and Peg, who sat beside him on the front seat took turns in telling her about Glendalough.

"Oh, it's such a strange place, Mehitable. It's where Saint

Kevin lived. There's a rocky place called 'Saint Kevin's Bed' where he used to stay. We'll see it to-day."

"He was the son of the King of Leinster," put in the Major.

Mehitable was interested to hear about St. Kevin, but there was such beauty all around her that she could hardly think of anything else. They were passing by a strange sweep of marshland, and through the gray green grass were flashes of gold and red, wild daffodils and tulips growing in the marsh. Wild fowl flew above, or hid with their young, in the long grasses. Mehitable caught her breath as they sped through the soft damp air. Now and then she closed her eyes and pretended she was back again in Cherryville mending her stockings on the side porch, Barbara reading aloud from "The First Violin." It was great fun to pretend this and then to open her eyes suddenly on the scene before her.

They slackened their speed as they went through the main street of the village of Wicklow, the Major calling out good-naturedly to the many tousled-haired children playing by the roadside. Black Castle, an old Norman keep towered above them, and Mehitable stood up to catch a glimpse of it as they left the village behind them. They were soon passing through the edge of Devil's Glen, a deep, dense wood, going very swiftly through the long dusky roadway which led around the outer end of the glen and finding themselves almost at once in the valley of Avonmore, a lovely bit of wooded ravine with the swirling river below. On and on they sped through the Vale of Avoca, and as they dipped up and down the gentle hills, the boys and Una began to sing some of Moore's songs. Mehitable tried to join in, but she could only hum the tunes softly not knowing the words.

"There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet,

As that vale in whose bosom the wild waters meet."
Surely the words of the song were true.

Soon they began to climb higher and higher, sloping valleys below them, wild stretches of woods as far as they could see, until at last they reached the strangest place in Ireland, St. Kevin's old home, Glendalough.

They jumped out of the motor and greeted Garry, who was waiting for them in front of a little inn at the edge of the wood, where they were to have lunch. They were all very hungry, so they decided to have lunch at once and then explore Glendalough. They began at once to unpack Garry's hamper of good things.

"We'll have tea late this afternoon over at the other end of the lake; it's near St. Kevin's Bed, so we had better go there the last thing," said Miles as he helped them spread out the lunch. He and his friend had had an uneventful ride over on the motorcycle.

They were soon enjoying the beef sandwiches, cold game pie, fruit, and biscuits that Taddy the cook had provided. They had their lunch on a long wooden table in the inn garden. "It will be much more fun at tea," Peg said to Mehitable. "Then it will really be a picnic."

It was a strange afternoon. The sky grew dark though it did not rain. There was a sense of mystery, a sense of the very far away past. "As far, far back as one can think and farther," Mehitable said to Guy as they walked through the silent, brooding wood by that still, secret lake, which many of the Irish people believe to be enchanted.

They were to meet the others at the far end where they were to have tea. They had explored the tower, which, in ancient days, the monks had used for retreat, and had roamed through

the ruins of the old, old churches that the long ago Saint Kevin had founded. It was still fairly early, and they were to go to Saint Kevin's Bed after tea.

"You know the story of St. Kevin, don't you?" asked Guy, as they walked under the great trees.

Mehitable shook her head. "Just that he was a saint, and that he lived here all alone," she answered.

"The story goes that a beautiful maiden was in love with him; that she followed him here, and that he drowned her in the lake, and since then no bird has ever flown across the lake."

Mehitable was interested at once. "Oh, do you believe that?" she asked.

Miles laughed. "I don't know whether I believe in the drowning," he answered, "but it is true that birds never fly across the lake."

They were nearing the bend in the lake and the others called to them. Peg who had been walking with them, ran on ahead and was soon deeply engrossed in watching the kettle boil, and would allow no one else to attend it. They had a very merry tea and the Major told many interesting stories about the place, and the country all around them. The ruins of the churches there, he told Mehitable, were almost the oldest in the world.

"Yes, Saint Kevin, was a very real person in his time," he said. "He did live here alone, but whether or not he really drowned the lady who made love to him—well that I could not vouch for," he added.

Just as they were finishing tea, they heard the soft sound of oars and coming around the bend of the lake toward them was an old man rowing a long boat. They sprang up

eagerly, leaving Garry to pack the tea things, for the boat was to take them to St. Kevin's Bed.

How still it was on the lake as they were rowed across. There was something sinister about it. The sun shone faintly, but it did not seem to brighten things. The sky was gray, and the lake and the woods seemed very black in contrast. Suddenly Mehitable felt very homesick. "It's funny," she thought, "the way homesickness comes, just all of a sudden." She would have given a great deal just then to have been picnicing in her own dear woods in Cherryville, with Barbara and the Bentlys and the boys, Robin and Johnnie. This place was beautiful, more beautiful than anything she had ever imagined, but she could never love it. It would always be full of charm, but full of sadness too.

As they neared the other side of the lake, Mehitable gazed in astonishment at two silent figures that stood one on each side of what looked like a small stone room. They were clad in green and at first it was difficult to distinguish them from the background of the wood.

"Who are they?" She asked Guy.

"The sentinels, who guard the Bed," he answered, as the boat glided noiselessly up to the sloping shore. "It's an old Irish custom," he added.

Soon they were climbing up the steep bank into the wood. Miles and his father helped them down to where the little room lay almost hidden in the gloom of heavy, dropping branches. This was where Saint Kevin lived, this lonely, mystery-haunted nook. He had wanted to die here, the Major told Mehitable, but had been persuaded by the monks to leave his cherished nook and found a monastery. It was a very silent place; except for the lapping of the water there was

not a sound. It breathed secrets of so long ago they could only seem myths to those happy picnickers of the present day.

It was growing dark, and the Major said they must be going, so they climbed down to the boat and were soon being rowed way down the lake to the little inn where they had lunched. There were deep shadows now across the lake. It was touched with gloom.

"Fancy spending the night here," whispered Una. "Think what strange dreams we would have."

Mehitable shuddered, half in fun and half in earnest. "Oh, Una," she answered, "I never thought there was a place like this anywhere in the world.

They made the journey home very quickly. Mehitable and Una sat side by side and once they fell asleep, Una with her head on Mehitable's shoulder. It had been a strange, delightful day. Mehitable decided that the very best part of it had been that long motor drive through the sweet Vale of Avoca, past the edge of the Devil's Glen, on their way to the shadow-haunted Glendalough. She thought over the day as she lay watching the shadows on the chintz curtains of their bed room window.

"How funny the old boatman was, when he told me that the fairies would find the handkerchief I lost," she thought, smiling to herself in the dark.

CHAPTER XXIII

A GLIMPSE AT DUBLIN

The days flew by so quickly, days of sun and rain, of early mornings in the dewy gardens, "Fairy hunts," as Peg called them in the wood, picnics on the Fairy Hill, one of their favorite haunts. It was a life entirely different from any that Mehitable had ever known. No one seemed to worry, they did things almost without any planning, and in spite of arrangements being made the last moment, everything seemed to work out well in the end. From the very first, Mehitable had not felt herself a stranger, hardly a guest, she was just one of them and could do as she liked.

In spite of all their fun, she had several quiet times to herself and in one of them she wrote a long letter to young Madame de Villiers, enclosing a little poem she had written about the wishing well. This is the poem:

THE WISHING WELL

Deep in the heart of a fairy dell
Far from the world and men,
I know a moss-grown wishing well
Safe in a primrose glen.

Many a secret whispered there,
Many a wish breathed low,
Many a hope and a promise fair,
With only the well to know.

Several letters came from Paris, one from Tip to them both, all the school happenings. There was also a letter from young Madame. Mehitable read it in the summer house at the far end of the garden. It was a great delight to have it and she opened it eagerly. Then she gave a gasp of surprise. Enclosed was a postal order for ten shillings and the news that the little poem about the lights of Paris had been accepted by an English magazine. Young Madame wrote that she had taken the liberty of sending the poem to the magazine and had not spoken of it, as she wanted to surprise Mehitable. The ten shillings was the money they sent in payment for the poem. Mehitable was excited and greatly pleased over this news, but she did not run to tell Una about it until she had read the letter several times. There was a warm feeling at her heart. Young Madame's letter had been so filled with interest for her.

Una was excited over the news of the poem and predicted all kinds of fame for Mehitable. "What will your Aunt Comfort say when she hears about it?" she inquired as the two were walking across the terrace the afternoon of the day that the letter had come.

"I wonder," answered Mehitable. "I'm going to send her the money," she went on. "It isn't very much of course, but Auntie will be so astonished that I earned it by writing a poem."

The very last days were drawing near. Day after to-morrow they would be saying goodbye to Garth Hall. They were talking over some of their good times, trying to decide which day of all the merry days had been the nicest one. Mehitable said to herself that no day had been as happy as the one that had brought her the letter from young Madame. "And I shall find her waiting at the Chateau when I get back," she thought.

The day before they were to leave there was a heavy storm; the wind howled around the old house, making "ghost noises," as Peg called them. They all spent the afternoon in the big kitchen, making toffee. What fun it was! How they laughed to see Guy and Miles with aprons tied about their necks as they pulled the sticky golden mixture. Taddy the cook spent the afternoon in her own room and so they were free to do as they liked. Little Miss Winchy, the governess, joined them, and as she and Mehitable were cracking nuts, she told her some stories of the O'Haras in their younger days. It cleared late in the afternoon and the two girls put on their coats and "galoshes" and went out for a last look around.

They were to leave early the next morning and the Major, announcing at dinner that he had business in Dublin, said that he would take the girls with him in the motor. Since their boat did not leave until after five in the afternoon, there would be time to run out to Howth, see the castle and the rhododendrons, have tea, and be on the Kingstown dock at sailing time. The suggestion was hailed with delight, and everyone wanted to come along too, but this time the Major shook his head. He was bringing some men back to Garth Hall for the night and would not have room for anyone on the homeward ride. "Except," he added, perhaps there might be room for Peg," smiling at his favorite, as he spoke. Peg hugged him, her usual way of expressing thanks.

They were off bright and early the next morning. Mrs. O'Hara kissed Mehitable goodbye very kindly, and told her that there would always be a warm welcome for her at Garth Hall. The boys repeated this sentiment and Guy suggested that she come back with Una for the summer holidays. "I'll teach you how to fish," he offered, as a fine inducement.

Miss Winchy asked Mehitable to write to her now and

then, and wept as she said goodbye to the two girls. "Poor Winchy always does weep," remarked Una, brushing some tears from her own eyes, as they settled themselves in the back seat of the motor.

Soon they had lost sight of Garth Hall and were speeding toward Dublin. What a wild stretch of land they had come upon suddenly, great spaces of rocks and moors with the morning mist still hovering over them. "It's the Rocky Valley," said Una. "You think you are way off in the wilds somewhere, don't you Mehitable? Well we'll be in Dublin before you know it."

They left the wild stretch and were soon dipping down a green and gold hill into the charming little village of Inniskerry, and then as Una said, "before they knew it they were in Dublin."

"Oh, Mehitable, it's too bad there are so many, many things to see. Oh, we could have such a splendid time in Dublin. Why must we go back to school so soon, Daddy? Do say we may stay a week longer. Write one of your nice letters to Madame to tell her we want a few days longer."

Mehitable and the Major laughed at this and the latter said firmly. "You cannot wheedle your old Daddy that way. I would never dare to go against the wishes of Madame."

"Who would dare?" thought Mehitable.

They had a few minutes to wait while the Major saw a man at the Kildare Street Club, a very old fashionable club which had had quite a famous history, Una told Mehitable. The three girls, for Peg was with them, spent the time while they were waiting, in a little antique shop near the club. Una had to take a brooch there to have mended at her mother's request, and Mehitable enjoyed looking at the beautiful old things under glass cases. Diamond shoe buckles, cameos, jewelled

hair combs, so many bits of long ago splendor. Mehitable could have spent an hour looking at them and making up stories about them, had there been time, but the Major was soon ready. They were off again down College Green, past old, gray Trinity College on one side and the Bank of Ireland on the other, and on through the dingy lower part of the city. Then suddenly they found themselves on a straight clean road by the sea on their way to Howth. It was very clear after the rain of the preceding day and far in the distance they could see the deep blue of the Carringford Hills, and beyond the faint etching of the Mourne Mountains, aginst the blue gray sky.

The Hill of Howth was bluest of them all, as it rose above the little fishing village of Howth itself. The quaint old harbor, the light house and a little farther out at sea, the brown mass of rocks called Ireland's Eye, made a lovely picture for them, as they neared the village, and then took the hill slowly. They were to have lunch at a little inn called the Waverly, and would go to the castle afterward. Their table was set by the window of the siting room of the inn and as they enjoyed the cold meat, hot potatoes and gooseberry tart, they could see sailing boats at anchor in the port below, watch the sea gulls floating lazily over "Ireland's Eye," and drink in the sweet bracken scented air.

"The moors are just above us," Peg volunteered, as she poured cream on her pudding. "I would like to live all alone in a little house on a moor. I'd have a goat for a pet, and I'd never be a bit lonely I'm sure. Mehitable, you could come and visit me sometimes," she added graciously.

They all laughed at this. The Major paid for their lunch and they were off down the hill in the motor. They left the gravel path that led to the demesne. As they neared the

car at the Castle gates and walked slowly along the winding path toward the castle itself, a great, gray, cold-looking structure, Una touched Mehitable's arm. "See," she said, "the front door is open. It is never shut, not even in the coldest winter weather."

Mehitable looked at the great oak door standing open to the May sunshine, and then looked back at Una. "Oh, why is it never shut?" she asked eagerly.

They were back of the Castle now, and were entering a deep wood through a low gateway. "Centuries ago, a woman pirate came and begged for shelter in the castle and was refused. To punish the Earl of Howth, she stole the heir, a young child, and it was only after a long time of trouble, and on their swearing that they would never shut the front door of the castle, that the pirate queen gave back the heir," Una replied, as they walked along the fragrant wood path.

"And that's why it's open to-day," said Peg, taking Mehitable's hand as they walked. Mehitable did not know what to say to this story. She tried to imagine it happening in America, but couldn't. Just then Peg said: "You're going to have a surprise in a minute."

"Oh, why did you say that, Peg? It won't be a surprise at all now. I wanted it just to burst upon her."

The Major had gone on a little way ahead and called back to them. "Summer is just ahead of us, come and see."

They ran toward him down the path and then, as they turned a corner, stood gazing before them. Steep cliffs rose above them, as high as they could see, and up their rocky sides, covering them with beauty, were masses of color—pink and rose, mauve and buff, scarlet and gold. Sun and shadow sifted through them, these clusters of rhododendron bushes. On and on, as they walked down the forest path, beauty followed them, glowing, magnificent. They said little as they

went, for there was nothing one could say that would quite express the wonder of it. They walked to the far end and back again, pausing now and then to look up silently at the gorgeous cliffs above them.

When they were back again, walking around the driveway of the castle, Mehitable turned to the Major. "It is the loveliest thing I've ever seen. Thank you for showing it to me," she said simply.

"Yes," answered the Major heartily, "there's nothing quite like the Howth rhododendrons, this time of year. But come, we've only just time to reach Kingstown and your boat. Hop in, all three of you."

They were off again, back toward Dublin, across the city, and again riding close to the sea. Howth stood out proudly, purple against the sky. Then a hurried goodbye to the Major and Peg, and they stood on the deck of the *Munster,* waving their handkerchiefs at the two, who waved back from the pier. The air was soft and Dublin, in the distance, a mass of gray and blue against the sunset sky. Lights shone out here and there from the city and from Kingstown, its harbor. Sudden lights glowed from the lighthouses. In the distance a boat tooted a loud farewell.

"Dear Peg," said Mehitable, wiping her eyes. "How I wish we could have brought her with us."

"Mother says that perhaps next winter she can come to the Chateau," answered Una, giving a last wave of her handkerchief, though the pier at Kingstown was now only a faint blur. She little knew what the next winter would bring, when she said so easily that Peg might come to the Chateau.

Una ordered tea, and they had it on deck. It was a calm evening and they greatly enjoyed sitting there in a quiet corner by themselves, watching the sea gulls that followed

the boat, feeling the soft wind on their faces. A little mist had come up and the dear country they had left such a little time before was only a cloud in the distance.

"Una, I love Ireland. It is strange, but I feel that I've dreamed about it before. I have always wanted to see it more than any place, and now I have seen it, now I know it," she added.

"It's home to me, of course," answered Una. "You seem just a part of it, Mehitable."

"I should like to be a part of it," she answered gravely.

They fell asleep at once on the train, only waking when Miss Derk, who shared their compartment, came in at Chester. Morning found them in London, but they only went from one station to another in the underground and Mehitable began to think she was fated never to see the city at all. They had an uneventful journey to Dover, and there met several Chateau girls, Chiona and Tip among them. They had come by another train. The time seemed very long after they left the boat at Calais. They were all impatient to reach the Chateau and welcomed the familiar omnibuses which were waiting for them at the station. It was late afternoon when they arrived. The door in the wall was opened for them by José, and they were back again in the old garden. How strange and yet how happy it seemed. "It's the dearest place," thought Mehitable, looking at the tree where her greatest happiness had found her. She ran up the garden path as she thought this and in another minute felt young Madame's arm around her. She had been waiting on the steps as they came in the gateway. "Oh," whispered Mehitable, "I've been happy all the way back because I knew I'd find you here."

What fun it was seeing everyone again! How much they

all had to say to each other at dinner. The travellers had theirs late, and Nancy, Tip, Jean and Gladys came and sat with them while they ate.

Nancy was very glad to see Mehitable, but all she said when greeting her was, "Well, Mehitable did you kiss the Blarney stone?"

The two sat together for a long time at the window of their room that night. Nancy was an odd figure in her gray spring dressing gown, her stiff braids of sandy hair standing out, one on each side of her small grave face. Only in Mehitable did Nancy ever confide, but the two had had many a quiet talk and were fast friends. "Someway a roommate is different from anyone else," thought Mehitable.

This evening Mehitable was almost too tired to tell about her experiences in Ireland, and Nancy was unusually talkative. She spoke of Scotland, of old Mr. Twilltrees, the minister, who would love to take Mehitable to Bobby Burn's Cottage, so near his own little home, when she came to Ayr to stay with Nancy. Nancy and Scotland! Would she some day visit Nancy? There was great charm in the thought. Would she some day know Mr. Twilltrees and his sister Abby who kept a dame school, Nancy's two aunts and all the quaintness of Ayr? Would they ever be a reality as was now Garth Hall with its enchanting gardens and its woods, Guy, Molly, Winchy, the Major? Perhaps, but already the Irish experience seemed a little like a very lovely dream.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PICNIC AT VERSAILLES

The days grew very warm after the spring vacation, and they were allowed to stay in the garden, providing they did not speak with each other during study hours. Mehitable wanted to make the best of every day for the last term was nearing its end, and though she and Una would be there next winter, a number of the others would be gone. Jean, of whom Mehitable was growing very fond, would be in Chicago, Chiona back in her beloved Japan, and Clythie in Switzerland with her parents. It would never be quite the same again, and Mehitable felt this very strongly as, from her green bench under the chestnut tree, she watched the girls walking slowly about the garden. What a strange, wonderful winter it had been, learning new ways and seeing so much of the beauty of the world! Less than a year ago she had not known any of these friends that now meant so much in her life. What would another winter bring forth, she wondered. For her at any rate it would mean hard work; she must teach French and English later, unless some miracle should happen so that she could earn her living by writing, instead! She smiled to herself, weaving some castles in the air about all that she would do "later on," but was brought suddenly to earth by remembering that the first examination was to be in four days and that she was not sure of all her verbs.

Mrs. Lindsay had written Madame that she would be sailing early in August from Japan, and to Mehitable's great joy it was planned that she should be with young Madame and

Phillippe in Belgium until she joined Mrs. Lindsay. School would be finished the middle of July and Mehitable was to travel with one of the governesses, for Phillippe and his mother left early in the month.

"The time will be so short until we see you again," young Madame said, as Mehitable clung to her when she said goodbye.

"It will be jolly having you with us, added Phillippe as he jumped into the motor. "We are sure to have adventures," he called back gaily, as his mother kissed her hand to the little, brown-clad figure waving to them from the door in the wall.

Una was with her, and as they turned away, she suggested to Mehitable that they look over the kodak pictures that had just come from Ireland. They sat on the green bench under Mehitable's tree by the wall. "What a dear Miss Meadows is, to have given me this jolly camera. See this one of you in the woods at Garth Hall—and this one of all of us at Glendalough. Oh, you will be the next one to go away Una," "It's only goodbye for a little while, until autumn, and we shall have such heaps to tell each other."

"I'll be an older girl. How funny that will seem," said Mehitable dreamily, as they paced up and down the garden walk.

They were all looking forward to Saturday, for they were to have the picnic at Versailles which was the crowning event of the year. It was one of the first things that the new girls heard about when they arrived at the Chateau, and all the year they looked forward to it. Saturday was fair and cool, at least when they started off, three omnibuses of them, and Madame driving in her funny little phaeton. Janey Dascrow, who had hurt her ankle, drove with Madame.

"I'm sorry for Janey," remarked Tip as they drove toward the Porte Maillot. "She will have to sit up so straight and talk so brilliantly with Madame."

When they left the city gates, they were allowed to speak English and what a chattering there was. Mehitable was always so fascinated to hear the English girls talk. She loved their soft, clear voices. Two letters had come for her just before they started and she had them with her in the pocket of the neat blue and white gingham which Aunt Comfort had sent her in a package from home.

"I'm thankful it's blue, even if it is so funnily made," Mehitable said to Una.

When once out on the wide, white road leading toward Versailles, they grew very hilarious and sang nearly all the English songs they knew, ending up with "Come back to Erin" as they drove through Versailles itself. It was market day and the Place des Armes was filled with people making their way to the market square in the oldest part of the town. The people jostled each other good-naturedly and called back and forth to each other in high chattering voices. Most of them were peasants from nearby towns. The spire of the cathedral of St. Louis gleamed in the sunshine.

Before them was the stone balustrade and gilded iron gate which shut off the great court of the palace from the Place des Armes. Here they alighted from the omnibuses and were soon roaming at their will through the wonderful gardens of the palace, that Louis XIV built in the long ago days.

"It's the Petite Trianon that I so want to see," Mehitable said to Una and Tip as the three of them waited for Clythie to join them. As far almost as they could see were gardens, also pink terraces and a blur of deep wood, beyond.

The great palace with its graceful wings stretching out on

each side, seemed a part of the old world that Mehitable loved, the world that whispered secrets to hear.

The girls were allowed to go about as they liked within the palace grounds, with the stipulation that they all meet at the gate at one o'clock so that they could go together to the woods for lunch. Una, Clythie, Tip, Chiona and Mehitable, after wandering about the gardens, finally found themselves inside the great palace. They strolled through vaulted passages, coming suddenly into the great Hall of the Crusaders, and on to the Battle Gallery where hung the tattered flags of the wars of centuries past. Tip liked this room and said she wished Phillippe were there to tell them about it. They wandered on to the theatre built by Louis XV, and where Marie Antoinette and her friends used to act their plays, before those dreadful days of the Revolution when the King of France, Louis XVI, and his gay, beautiful Queen were beheaded.

When they came out again the sunshine dazzled them, for the palace had been dark and musty. They walked across to the Petite Trianon, the house that Marie Antoinette loved best of all, and where she spent her happiest hours. Little rustic English cottages surrounded it and in the midst of all the dignity and grandeur of the great palace, this little playground of a dead Queen, had something of pathos about it.

Someone called them to join the others and soon they were all making their way toward the wood beyond the Queen's walk, a lovely avenue of trees and shrubs, through which gleamed marble statues. The shade of the wood was grateful after the hot glare of the July sun, and they enjoyed the patties, cakes and fruit which Tip and several of the other girls, passed around in baskets.

After lunch they rested under the trees and Mehitable read

her letters. Desire's was characteristic. This is part of it: "I held out for blue when your Aunt Comfort was making those ginghams. Si sends respects, says he guesses you won't miss the birthday roses this year, with all the French posies, but I know better." Mehitable felt a lump in her throat as she read this. Yes she would miss the birthday roses more than she could say.

In her letter Barbara said, "I'm going to have supper with your aunt, on your birthday, and she has asked Robin, and Johnnie. Oh, think how far away you'll be. It's almost a year since your birthday and the coming of the letter from Mrs. Lindsay. I think of your life more than my own, Mehitable. Una and Clythie and Tip seem almost as real as the Bentlys. Will we ever have the old days back, I wonder. I put my hair up Sunday, and wore my new blue lawn."

Una saw that there were tears in Mehitable's eyes, when she came up to her. She leaned her head a little wearily against the tree trunk and said with a choke in her voice, "Barbie's letter seems sad. Oh, I'm sorry for dear Barbara."

"I wish she could be with us to-day," said Una. "But come and see the fountains, we are all going, it's after five."

When they came out of the wood, Mehitable put up her arm to shield here eyes from the magnificence of the scene before her. The great palace with its stately wings, spreading fan-like, each side, its many gardens and terraces, and as far as one could see, silver rainbow sprays of water, flashes of green, gold, and rose through the sparkle of innumerable fountains. It was so dazzling a sight that one might well imagine one had strayed into fairyland by mistake.

Mehitable was so quiet when they climbed up into the omnibus, that Madame Bourget exclaimed, "Tiens, petite, you have overfatigued yourself."

Mehitable shook her head, smiling. "No—it was the fountains—I never saw anything like them before," she answered.

"We waited till five for they turn on the water power then," explained Gladys, jumping up and sitting on one side of Mehitable. This practical explanation made Mehitable laugh, but the fountains at Versailles always held for her the charm of a dream.

The days flew by, examinations came and went, and finally, a hot late July morning arrived when Mehitable stood in the garden gate and waved goodbye to all her schoolmates, Una, Clythie and Tip. She herself would be leaving the next day for Belgium.

As the last white flutter of handkerchiefs ceased, Mehitable wiped the tears from her eyes, and thought to herself, "It will never be just the same again, whatever happens, it will never be just the same."

CHAPTER XXV

BELGIUM—1914

The governess with whom Mehitable was to travel to Belgium was detained, so it happened that she went with Fräulein instead. Phillippe and his mother were to meet her with the car at Liège and Fräulein to go on her way to Germany.

Madame went with them to the Gare du Nord and gave Mehitable several last messages for her daughter-in-law, as she bade her an unusually affectionate goodbye. Mehitable had hardly said goodbye to the Chateau itself. In two months she would be back again, and now that all her schoolmates had gone, she herself was glad to set out on a new adventure.

"It's not really goodbye at all, dear Chateau, it's just *au revoir,*" she thought as the garden gate closed behind her.

She and Fräulein had a sociable time together on the train. How different from their last journey! There was no need now to ask Fräulein questions about the Chateau. Instead, Mehitable talked almost constantly about the school, of the picnic, her delight in having had a good mark in the grammar examination. She had had no classes with Fräulein and they had had no real talk together, since their last journey.

"I miss it already, I mean school and the girls. Doesn't it seem strange to think we are not there doing the everyday things?"

They had a sociable lunch together, cold fowl, bread and butter, and the cherry tarts of which Fräulein did not approve.

She enjoyed them however, and was so cheered toward the end of the meal that she talked to Mehitable about the engagement of her niece Elsa to a young Prussian officer. Fräulein had been very uneasy since the assassination of the Grand Duke, Francis Ferdinand and Duchesse Sophia. The news had reached the girls only vaguely. They saw no newspapers and had been deep in school doings and examinations at the time.

It was raining a little as the gray spires of Liège showed against a dull sky. Mehitable's heart beat quickly as she pressed her face against the window in order to catch the first glimpse of young Madame and Phillippe. There he was! Phillippe waving his gray cap, his face smiling a welcome. Beside him stood a large, rosy-faced woman in a cloak and frilled cap. She held a basket on her arm, and a long cucumber peered out of one end of it. Fräulein had to change cars, so she and Mehitable alighted together. In a second they had greeted Phillippe and been introduced to fat, jolly Madame Nollette. There were hurried goodbyes to Fräulein, as the guard called her train. Mehitable waved to her and she waved back, calling, "Au revoir," as a parting word. Then came eager questions and explanations. Young Madame had gone in answer to a wire to meet Major de Villiers at Havre. His boat had just arrived. Phillippe and Mehitable were to stay, the few days of her absence, with good Madame Nollette, his old Flemish nurse. He brought a note from his mother to Mehitable and she read it hurriedly as they walked through the station.

"This is only a hasty line to welcome you. My husband's boat is at Havre and I must see him, as he may not be off duty for some time. You and Phillippe will have a happy time with kind Madame Nollette, who took care of him, when

he was a baby, and I shall feel that my two dear children are in good hands until I return," so the letter ran.

"See, Mehitable," Phillippe's voice interrupted her. "Isn't it splendid that I have the motor?"

They had passed through the waiting room and there, standing by the platform was the dear familiar gray car." Oh, Phillippe!" was all Mehitable could say.

"Mother knows I can run it quite as well as she, and so she left it for us. She said she knew she could trust me to be careful."

"What fun!" said Mehitable delightedly, as she jumped up into the back seat beside Madame Nollette.

She was very disappointed at not finding young Madame, but tried to think only of her friend's happiness. "Oh, Phillippe, I'm so glad your father has come. You must be very impatient to see him," she said, as Phillippe guided the car carefully through the crowded street.

"I am," he answered, without looking around. "He will join us somewhere as soon as he can. We thought he would have leave right away, but he isn't sure yet."

They were nearing the outskirts of the town and the late sun touched to gold the rows of neat little gardens in front of neat little houses. They passed women in quaint peasant dress, short skirts of red or gray, laced girdles, and funny, round, dark Flemish caps. They carried baskets that during the day had been filled with fresh vegetables which they had sold in the market square.

Soon the gray motor stopped before a pretty, vine-covered cottage, quite in the country, the home of Madame Nollette, and she talked cheerily as they alighted and walked up the flower-bordered garden path.

"You are welcome, my lamb," she said to Mehitable. "You and the young master shall have as happy days as old fat Madame Nollette can give you, and plenty of cream and sweet cakes."

A big white cat met them at the threshold of the pleasant little sitting room, with its plain oak settle, its row of blue and white china above the mantle. A table covered with a blue cloth and laid ready for supper, stood in the middle of the room. On it was a pewter jug filled with yellow roses and ferns. The roses were from Madame Nollette's favorite bush, by the side door, and the ferns, Phillippe told Mehitable, he had picked in the woods the day before.

"We'll have some fine times, Mehitable. Nurse says we may have as many picnics as we like," he said as they sat at supper.

He was right, they did have merry times. It was a new life for Mehitable, those few days that followed, the change from the strictly planned school days to the carefree existence at Madame Nollette's cottage. The motor afforded them their chief amusement. They would dash off in it at a moment's notice, with a well-filled picnic basket under the seat, and because the old nurse so enjoyed the rides, they generally took her with them. She would feed her chickens, draw together the little blue curtains at the front windows and off they would go.

One night at supper, a few days after Mehitable had come, Madame Nollette's jolly face was clouded. She had an evening newspaper and read it frowningly, ejaculating under her breath. "Miserable, incredible!"

The newspaper was in Flemish, and so she explained its contents to the other two. "It's bad news, darling little

cabbages," she said in French. "The Germans are all astir. Heaven keep them from coming this way. It's all because of that Serbian business," she added.

Then, trying to be cheerful for the children's sake, she went over to the cubboard and brought out a jar of golden jelly. "Come, loves, don't let Nurse Nollette's worry spoil your supper. Here is some of my fig jam." She looked lovingly at Mehitable as she spoke. She herself had plaited the thick, smooth, brown braid of hair that hung over the young girl's shoulder. To Nurse Nollette, Phillippe was still the child she had cared for, and Mehitable just another child.

As she finished speaking, the gate clicked, and someone knocked on the door a moment later. It was a messenger with a wire. He was breathless, and turned away as he handed it to Phillippe. "The wires are down—you can't send an answer—the Germans are trying to cross the border." He was gone like a flash.

The message was for Phillippe, and said: *"Start with Mehitable for Havre at once. Bring Nurse Nollette if possible. De Villiers."*

There was consternation in the little cottage. Poor Madame Nollette burst into tears. There was danger, and the Major had sent for the children. She herself could never leave the home she had had so long. Her cow, the chickens, her old paralyzed auntie, who lived nearby. She must send them off without her.

They learned from a neighbor that the trains has been commandeered for soldiers, and after thinking quietly, Phillippe said, "We will travel by motor to Mauberge. It's a little town in France, almost where France and Belgium meet. We can leave the car and I hope get a train there that will connect us with a through train to Havre."

Phillippe seemed suddenly to be a little boy no longer. He turned to Nurse Nollette. "I think we had better start at early dawn. If all goes well, it's only a few hours ride. Please pack a valise with things you need most, Mehitable. We had better get some rest until four o'clock."

They obeyed him. After a few attempts they ceased to urge Nurse Nollette to go with them, seeing what a tragedy it would be for her. "It will all blow over, Nurse, but I wish you were coming too," said Phillippe, giving her a bear hug when they said goodbye in the early dawn.

"So do I, dear Madame. Oh, you have been so good. God bless you," cried Mehitable impulsively as she too hugged the good woman.

Madame could only answer with sobs, but as the motor started, she called out, "God be with you, my darlings," waving her apron as Phillippe started the car.

The sat together in the front seat. Mehitable's brown valise, Phillippe's bag, a basket of provisions on the floor behind.

"The shabby brown valise is having adventures too," thought Mehitable.

The sun was only just peering over the gray green lines in the distance. What was that very faint, far away sound? "Cannonading," said Phillippe, as they sped through the cool sweet air. "I hate running away from things."

There were wagons filled with people and household goods ahead of them, and it was some little time before they got by. They passed groups of people on foot, some sobbing and others talking excitedly.

"They've invaded the country—they're on their way—the Germans. You will see, they will wait aid, the people at Liege, until it is too late. How few of us are leaving."

It seemed to Phillippe and Mehitable that a great many were leaving and when he had to stop the car for a moment, almost in the same breath both of them exclaimed, "We must help the others."

There was sobbing by the roadside. A man in Belgian uniform came up to them. "I'm due at Liège to join my regiment—cannot leave my wife and sick baby to travel alone. For God's sake what shall I do?"

"We will take them somewhere to safety," answered Phillippe.

"Address Private Jean Galgore, 8th Division, 3rd Regiment. God reward you."

He helped his wife and baby into the back seat of the car. Mehitable, hearing the low crying of the baby, jumped out and then seated herself beside the woman. "I'll hold the baby," she said gently to the pale mother.

An old man with a crutch, father to the woman, climbed in beside Phillippe, and they sped on their way.

It was a weary way. The sun was hot, the air heavy. They had to wait for long intervals, as wagons blocked the road. Mehitable's arms grew very tired, for the baby was heavy, and did not cease its tedious, wailing cry. The woman, who spoke only Flemish, sobbed softly to herself, wringing her hands. She was recovering from a serious illness, so the grandfather told Phillippe in a few words in French.

Mehitable lay the baby on the mother's lap, while she opened the basket, and soon baby and mother were refreshed with sweet milk from a stone jar Nurse Nollette had thoughtfully put in. Later on they all had some fruit and sandwiches.

"They taste like sawdust," said Phillippe, smiling over his shoulder at Mehitable. In fact their mouths were so dry

from the heat and excitement, that they hardly tasted what they ate.

The slow hours dragged by, and still because of many delays, they had not reached Mauberge. The baby still wailed, and the mother uttered prayers under her breath or fell into a fitful sleep. Mehitable's whole body ached, but she tried to forget it. She sang bits of songs to the baby, who rewarded her with a smile and finally fell asleep.

Mehitable dared not sleep for fear of dropping him. She half closed her eyes and tried to think of happy things, the quiet Chateau schoolroom, the daffodil walk at Garth Hall, dear young Madame, but most of all she thought of Cherryville.

Very faintly, they still heard the far boom of cannonading. Dear Cherryville, the wild clematis in the hollow, Barbara, most of all Aunt Comfort. Mehitable sat up suddenly very straight, making a more comfortable place for the baby's head. She gave Phillippe a reassuring smile as he glanced back at her. "We are all right," she said.

Aunt Comfort would be glad to know that she had tried to remember her grandfather who had been so brave under fire. Aunt Comfort was nearest in her thoughts, her own flesh and blood. She must be all that Aunt Comfort would wish, in this, her biggest adventure.

There was no train at Mauberge and they had to keep on. It was a little easier now, for they had outdistanced the refugees. Now they were in France! They heard on all sides that France and England had declared war.

Fortunately they were able to keep to by-roads and therefore the great masses of the French army, marching to the various stations, did not delay them.

"At the next town there is a train. Yes, surely, for Havre," so they were told.

When they reached the town, Phillippe told the station master that his father was a Major in the French army, that he must reach Havre as soon as possible. He gave the man a tip and begged him to help them. "You see that I must take care of this young lady, the old man and the woman with the baby."

The station master was kind, and promised to see that the motor was taken to the Commandant's garage and left in Major de Villiers' name. Phillippe had to trust him, and after a long, weary wait in the crowded station, they all boarded the train for Havre.

"We'll have to take them right along, Mehitable. We can't just leave them by the way," said Phillippe, nodding toward the huddled figures of the old man and the mother. Mehitable nodded.

She still held the baby, and her face was very white. She was covered with dust and her hat was on one side. Phillippe bought tickets and at last the train drew in.

They found seats for the lame man and the woman and finally one for Mehitable. Slowly the hours crept by. They were held up for connections for long intervals at various stations waiting for the commandeered trains to go through. There was excitement everywhere, tense, unspeakable.

At last, Havre! The station, a fly which took them to the Villiers' hotel. The meeting with young Madame. Major de Villiers, dark, quiet, like the photograph in the old wing. His joy at seeing Phillippe. His kind fatherly greeting to Mehitable. Their explanations. The Major's quiet nod of praise for them both. Young Madame's white face, her tears of thankfulnss. "Oh, you blessed children. To think that

you have had to do all this alone." Later she would be steady and helpful and splendid, but just then she could only weep.

The refugees were kindly cared for and after a night of exhausted sleep, Mehitable and Phillippe, with young Madame boarded a boat for England. The Major sent a cable to Mrs. Lindsay, whose sailing from Japan would be delayed, telling her Mehitable was safe with friends, and a similar one to Aunt Comfort. He also wired to his mother, who was still in Paris.

He was leaving at once for the front with his regiment and he waved them goodbye from the pier. Young Madame did not weep now. "Her face is the face of a soldier's wife," thought Mehitable, as they stood with Phillippe, one on each side of Madame de Villiers, watching France fade into the distance.

And next winter? The future? What did it matter if her little plans were changed? This was a time to help. She had known that, with a very happy feeling at her heart, while she had held the sick baby in her arms, and with these dear and already tried frends, she would not be afraid to face whatever might come.

"I wish we'd brought Nurse with us," said Phillippe.

"I feel sure that she is safe. The good God that Nurse Nollette has always so trusted will take care of her." Young Madame put her arms around the shoulders of Mehitable and Phillippe, as she spoke. "It's going to be the greatest time the world has ever known, children. France and England will have need of every one of us. I'm so glad I have you both to help me do my part."

Sunshine touched Mehitable's face as she looked up and said. "I will do all I can with you and for you."